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"Real Girls' Talk": A Dramaturgy of Witness and Survival

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”Real Girls’ Talk”: A Dramaturgy of Witness and Survival

by

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Thesis

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Dedication

To all those who think as I do, there are so many. Thank you for bearing witness to this testimony.

Acknowledgements

To my parents, my cohort, my community, my mentors, my sisters thank you for listening to me over and over again, for always picking up the phone, for never making me make an appointment and always being happy to see me, for asking the hard questions, for buying wine and making mind maps, for dog-sitting and house-sitting, for believing in this theory even when I couldn't, for sending a text message every morning and for keeping the faith.

Abstract

"Real Girls' Talk": A Dramaturgy of Witness and Survival

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Nina Simone and Lorraine Hansberry became good friends during the last few years of Hansberry's life. In this thesis I argue, that their relationship served as a catalyst for both of their revolutionary performances of survival. The Simone-Hansberry friendship almost always warrants a mention in any publication about one woman or the other. However, their friendship almost never warrants *more* than a mention. Little space is given to the revolutionary fact that two talented Black women, both fiercely independent and self-proclaimed loners, found each other and loved each other and that that love made a difference in the nation. This thesis is an exploration of their friendship through the revolutionary lens of conscious dramaturgy. I ask the question: How did they bear witness to each other? And how was their witness a performative act of revolution? I am interested in the performative marginality that surrounds the language of testimony; the act of bearing witness. In particular, I highlight the Black woman's struggle against her immense vulnerability to natal alienation and social death. I look to the public testimony (a term that encompasses performance, speech, and written text) of Nina

Simone and Lorraine Hansberry—and some of my own testimony—and seek to explore how vulnerability to violence and alienation is occasionally upended by the possibility of transcendence and revolutionary social change through the performance of witnessing.

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Sister,

I believe that it is necessary to acknowledge you immediately. Pretense is a luxury not often afforded to abjected identities, and I will not bother with formality. I am guessing that like me you are young, gifted and Black. You are a woman and that you have agreed to bear witness to this testimony. I begin with a question: What does it mean to survive as an outsider? This journey is an inquiry into the dramaturgy of an outsider's performance of survival. It is an exploration into what it takes to live at the intersection of gender and racial oppression and I am glad to have you with me. I seek to read, through a conscious dramaturgy, what it means to be a witness. An identity, which is both the audience to and the performer of a revolution.

There is a precedent in the field of dramaturgy for a theoretical approach that posits guessing as a form of knowledge creation.[1] This tactic is born out of a craft where the skill of pattern recognition is an essential tool for evocative storytelling. At the very least, an audience must be able to see for itself how the events on a stage might be in conversation with the events of the world. So in dramaturgy to imagine what might be is as important as seeing what is, and in fact is often necessary in the process of creation. I believe that conjecture is more than enough to conjure a reality, so in my guessing you now exist—as I imagine—and I can continue in the presence of you. You see Sister, I

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[1] Bertolt Brecht in his theoretical work on dramaturgy *The Messingkauf Dialogues* thought of theatre as an entity that should be the product of contemporary knowledge and in his case scientific thought and inquiry. Though he did not imagine that emotions or feelings—the hallmark of the arts—and scientific thought were mutually exclusive, he did believe that feelings were another way of creating knowledge. Brecht wrote: "Why should I want to knock out the whole realm of guessing, dreaming, and feeling?… Guessing and knowledge are not opposites" (Trencsényi 119).

know and love you, and I'd like for you to know and love me as well. Given the "profound desolation of [our] reality," as Toni Morrison says, "[we] may well have invented [ourselves]" (Morrison 24). So I will invent you, my witness, to bear the truths that I carry and corroborate my story. Our kinship is a rare truth in a world full of false familiarity; our claim to both know and love each other is revolutionary.

I have found that the value of storytelling is intrinsic to the human experience. Nourishment and naming filled the first moments of my life, my mother fed me and my father named me. Now that you are conjured and invented Sister, I feel that I must go about the business of telling you the story of your name: of who we are. Nina Simone's mother named her youngest daughter Eunice and foretold of her greatness: "I knew she was a special child because her name was given to me before she was born" (Cohodas 15). Someone gave me your name as well. You are the performance of witness; you are the testimony of the revolutionary possibility of survival. You are here and I am here, which means that we have survived. We have survived in a world not particularly interested in our survival, and in a world deeply invested in our marginalization, our abjection and (when our use is exhausted) our annihilation. How did we do this; how did we live? Here is my hypothesis: We survived because we did it together. You are, because I have conjured you. I am because of you.

YOU ARE A WITNESS

James Baldwin stood with Lorraine Hansberry behind the Ethel Barrymore Theatre after the opening of *A Raisin in the Sun,* and he watched:

> I watched the people, who loved Lorraine for what she had brought to them; and watched Lorraine, who loved the people for what they brought to her. It was not, for her, a matter of being admired. She was being corroborated and confirmed. She was wise enough and honest enough to recognize that Black American artists

> are a very special case. One is not merely an artist and one is not judged merely as an artist: the Black people crowding around Lorraine, whether or not they knew it considered her a witness. (Nemiroff and Hansberry xiii)

Like Hansberry, you are a witness Sister, because you corroborate and confirm. You corroborate the truth of the Black American experience. You do this not just from an act of watching—which has the effect of erasing agency—but from a place of knowing. Your knowledge lives in your body and you corroborate with that body. You throw your hands up in agreement, you snap your neck in frustration, you roll your back in ecstasy. Corroboration lives in you. Your corroboration is a confirmation that, beyond this text, I exist.

Dwight Conquergood and D. Soyini Madison explore this idea in their Critical Ethnographic and Performance Ethnographic work: "Dialogic performance as Co-performative witnessing is ultimately a political act, because it requires that we do what Others do with them" (Madison 829). To be a witness, Sister, you must do what others do, not in imitation but in "Intimate Habitation".[2] To look at someone and attempt to understand how their world might make your world better is an act of science, law and art. It is the act of giving audience. Being an audience is an identity of distance and has the consequence of making the "you" distinct from the "them." But, as a witness you are "inside the politics of their locations, the economies of their desires and their constraints, and, most importantly, inside the materiality of their struggles and the consequences" (Madison 829). The consequences of witnessing are not separate from the original action witnessed. Consequently, a witness is a marked body. The idea of witness

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[2] Madison borrows the term "Intimate Habitation" from Gayatri Spivak and Kamala Visweswaran. For more information reference Spivak and Visweswaran.

is that it blurs the line between audience and performer, spectator and actor, and implicates all involved.

YOU ARE A SURVIVOR

Saidiya Hartman, in her book *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Rout*e, recounts the words of former slaves: "'I do not know my father.' 'I have lost my mother.' 'My children are scattered in every direction.' These were common refrains in the testimony. As important were the silences and evasions, matters cryptically encoded" (Hartman 16). Hartman elucidates in this passage how for Black Americans kinship is fundamentally defined by absence. To care about someone emotionally often comes alongside the inability to take care of them physically. Hartman's book chronicles her journey to Ghana in search of an African ancestry: "I arrived in Ghana intent upon finding the remnants of those who had vanished" (Hartman 18). Vanishing in this sense isn't only the absence of kinship; it is the violent removal of legacy. What does it mean then to be born of the vanished?

Performance Studies theorist Diana Taylor thinks of it this way, "Heritage, linked etymologically to inheritance, again underlines the material property that passes down to the heirs. Humanity might well be considered both the producer and the consumer of these cultural goods, but its abstraction undermines the sense of cultural agency" (Taylor 23). Sister, as people whose heritage is erased we must think of our inheritance as co-temporal and as such always being re-generated in the present. Even more than an "intangible heritage" we have an alienable one so that our recognition of any repertoire is a performative witness of the past, present and future (Taylor 23).

YOU ARE A REVOLUTIONARY

I often grapple, Sister, with the difference between a radical and a revolutionary. I am surrounded by so many radicals, folks whose worldview depends fundamentally on the opposition of others. Opposition is a powerful force. I imagine what it would be like to square off against a diametrically opposed foe. I crave a fair fight. I dream of the privilege of radicalization. You see, Sister, you and I are revolutionaries. We live in a culture where our bodies, our minds and our spirits are ill-suited. No amount of reform or reconciliation will reimagine Blackness as a separate but equal force in this society. We tried; it didn't work. So, our position is that of the revolutionary. We are the quixotic voice screaming into the void. Demanding a world that doesn't exist, dreaming it until it does and rejecting the rationality of the reality of the status quo. Lorraine Hansberry in a letter to the New York Times marked the many myriad ways that Black people have found revolution in our six centuries on this continent. There is no resistance that we have not tried in the name of revolution. The consequence of that legacy of freedom fighting, Sister, is that our action is not what marks us as revolutionaries. Our bodies mark us. We are revolutionaries. Revolutionaries are people who go into courtrooms and demand justice though they know none will come until the courtroom is destroyed. Revolutionaries march toward lynch mobs with songs instead of guns and walk hungrily into lunch counters where they will never be served. When the option is to sit in the back of the bus or get beaten, revolutionaries walk. The revolutionary imagination, conjures an impossible reality every day and speaks to it. So if you see me on the street, Sister, talking to myself know that I'm talking about revolution.

I am interested in the performative marginality that surrounds this language of testimony, in particular I want to highlight the Black woman's struggle against her immense vulnerability to alienation and death. I look to the public testimony (a term that

encompasses performance, speech, and written text) of Black women and seek to explore how their constant vulnerability to violence and alienation is occasionally upended by the possibility of transcendence and revolutionary social change through performance. I understand this as a tool of revolution: a Black woman's survival performance ritual.

Sister, you perform all of these identities over and over again without the hope of recognition. You perform them because in the performance itself lies the possibility of survival.

I continue your introduction to reality with this assumption, that to be a woman, to be Black and to love Blackness is also to be loathed, disdained, and disregarded. In that disregard, we are marked as the counter to the mainstream discourse by associating with each other. To identify as a revolutionary "one enters at one's own risk" (Warner 121).

In the title essay, of his foundational theoretical text *Publics and Counterpublics,* Michael Warner, explores what a public is in contrast to other social formations including the public, which is functionally and ideologically larger than the self-arranging publics that he engages. He theorizes that the collective readers of a text are a public as are the attendees of a concert or the listeners of a radio show. A public he defines in contrast to a counterpublic. A counterpublic is an indefinite group of socially marked strangers. Marked by their participation in this group. Together, Sister, you and I are a counterpublic.

Warner, continues that a public uses textual verbs of "private reading… ask, reject, opine, decide, judge and so on. Publics can do exactly these things and nothing else" (Warner 123). Counterpublics tie to no such discourse, no form of expression is privileged, and their agency can be expressed and embodied in any number of ways. I suggest that our counterpublic is a transient transcendent type of staged performance. It is

a people—that's us—but it is also many places and at appointed times and I will undertake the dramaturgical task of finding patterns in several different performances that evoke the possibility of survival at the end of our story. Because of where and when we have been, we know when and where we can be known and understood. How then can we understand this performative counterpublic?

Narratively, I'd like to start with what is most familiar—a small sample of what could be imagined into being. The first page of a play—every dramatist knows—is the most important of the script, because the first page is where we find the setting. Every story no matter the genre, needs a setting. This tool gives us three things that orient us to the world of the play. In Ancient Greece, Plato termed these the three unities and there was an expectation of consistency. The action of theatre was in one place, during one time, telling one person's story. Predictably, Sister, our counterpublic is also a type of counter-narrative, defying notions of unity and subscribing instead to opportunity. When and where we perform our survival is determined by the opportunity of place, the appointment of time, and the position of our people.

SETTING: IN THE MARGIN

Performance anthropologist Victor Turner in his essay, "Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality" identifies moments in culture where society performs a rite of passage marking the transition from one state to another (466). Turner names this phenomenon "plural reflexivity," he understands it as liminal state (a threshold). Through an investigation of historical societal rituals, Turner sets up rules for this time. He argues that norms are inverted, gender and class are reversed and society is able to rehearse the world as it could be: "In times of *radical social change*, some of these sacred items… enter the public arena as part of the repertoire of prophetic leaders

who mobilize the people against invaders or overlords threatening their culture(Turner 470, emphasis mine). I offer that Turner's societal threshold is a type of cultural stage, one where subaltern identities can rehearse, perform, and potentially enact revolutionary social change in a way that is impossible outside of this collective liminal state. In this thesis I attempt to pinpoint two of these moments of societal threshold in the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and in the rise of the Black Liberation Movement in 1968. This project examines four testimonies of resistance and survival by two Black women in 1964 and 1969. I argue that the radical liminality of the United States in the time leading up to and in the wake of the Civil Rights Act, Freedom Summer, and the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. facilitated the performance of revolution found in Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam" and "Young, Gifted, and Black" and Lorraine Hansberry's *The Movement* and *Young, Gifted, and Black*. Two of these testimonies occur at the height of the Civil Rights era before the Black Power Movement and the Black Arts Movement began to reflect a change the Black cultural imaginary. The other two take place just as the cultural and political tide begins to turn from integrationist sentiments to Radical Black Power. I consider each testimony and the women who bear witness in relation to the world in which they live. I seek to find connective tissue in their legacies of revolution and survival where their testimony transcends the vulnerability of their race and sex and takes the stage for revolutionary social change.

TIME: A REFLEXIVE ONE

The theoretical framework of my argument comes from Orlando Patterson's sociological theory of natal alienation as it relates to social death. According to Patterson the theory of social death necessitates alienation from any rights to a legitimate heritage (Patterson 5). Patterson understands the place of the slave in society as a type of

institutionalized marginality hemmed into the fabric of culture due to of the loss of natality (46). He engages with Victor Turner's theories of liminality to explain the place of the slave in the slave holding society. An outsider without being an outcaste, the slave occupies a place of perverse intimacy in order to make a parasitic relationship between the owner and the slave possible (Patterson 340). According to Turner, liminality can also be understood as the place where the performative lives in a society. What follows is that the intimacy fostered by the slave/slaveholder relationship allows for the enslaved person to be a part of the performative legacy of her country. I make two continuations of this argument:

1) Natal alienation continues through the legacy of slavery in what Saidiya Hartman argues is the "intimate affiliation of liberty and bondage" into the 20th and twenty-first century in this country under systemic racism and creates liminal spaces which Lisa Marie Cacho terms "spaces of living death" (Hartman 115, Cacho 60).

2) Natal alienation is both a biological and cultural genealogical parasite that alienates blood from blood and in a narrowly Marxist sense alienates the worker (if we can recognize the Black body as worker) from her labor.

The result is labor which is part of the greater cultural fabric and a worker who is hemmed into a marginal space, meaning that narratives of Black Americans were subject to Victor Turner's "plural reflexivity." Plural reflexivity as the in-between time, the time where society is not what it was and not what it will become, the threshold where a community collectively reflects on itself through performative acts. I envision this

threshold as multi-use site both stage and bridge. The performative possibility of this stage is the ephemeral potentially to cross over from socially dead subject to cultural change agent. This theoretical framework reveals the works of Nina Simone and Lorraine Hansberry as happenings in the greater cultural imaginary and tests the causal thesis that the legacy of survival of social death is fundamentally challenged by moments of cultural plural reflexivity.

DRAMATIST PERSONAE: THE BLACK WOMAN

Like Nina Simone and her youthfully resolute piano protest, and very much like you, Sister, every Black woman has an origin story. To understand the marginalization of both our bodies and our narratives, I'd like to interrogate the origin story of the marginalized Black woman. To recognize where she emerged in an effort to see how in a particular moment of revolution, a group of Black women imagined transcendence.

In Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters,* the author recounts the slave narrative of Margaret Garner, an escaped slave woman who under threat of re-capture murders one of her daughters and attempts the murder of her other three children. The ghost of Garner's murdered daughter is buried in a grave simply marked *Beloved,* and her epitaph is the inspiration for title of Toni Morrison's Novel *Beloved*. "If I hadn't killed her she would have died," is Garner's reported cry as she is captured after the murder (Gordon 140). These words echo those of my great aunt Viola, who has often said that her prayer was that the Lord let her live long enough to see her children grown, "Because it's a rare woman that can love another woman's children as her own." Children of slavery, the survivors of vanished mothers, lived out a prescribed future. Scattered in every direction, defined by what they are not, and who they do not know. The children of slavery have been orphaned and raised not to live but to die.

Born of the vanished and raised in order to die, for a slave the narrative of living was not a triumphant undertaking, "Alongside the terrible things one had survived was also the shame of having survived it" (Hartman 16). Often speaking, in code, in fable or in song the archive of the performance of slavery is overwhelmingly mis-remembered through written slave narratives captured by well meaning abolitionists. The story of Margaret Garner is only known through abolitionist literature and newspaper articles, it has never been passed down in her own words (Gordon 144). Not only are their lives haunted by absence so too are their remembered histories. "'They forgot many things' the slave narrative that is. The slave narrative was the principal form by which the experience of slavery was conveyed in the nineteenth century… primarily [a] white and female reading public" (Gordon 143). Feminists took up the cause of Margaret Garner to underscore the gendered horrors of slavery. Though her predicament was a deeply personal one, her narrative became an abolitionist battle cry (Gordon 153). Well-intentioned abolitionist recast the narratives of Garner and countless others in order to appeal to a sympathetic public but fundamental different from them. Not only were these narratives an act of vanishing any lived truth behind the experience of enslaved people, they were also a privileging of the white experience. This is how and where we began to learn our story in this country, Sister. So that, telling our own story is always an attempt at freedom from a historically enslaved narrative.

SETTING THE STAGE: METHODOLOGY

I use a three-point rubric for my analysis. Firstly, I seek to interrogate Turner's notion of liminality as a threshold. I imagine that the implications of this for the Black body is that in-betweenness, once the permanent place of social death, is now an embodied tool for rehearsing truths and performing survival. Second, I engage with the

idea that identities that cannot survive in the world as it is, can live, and even thrive in the liminal imaginary. Third, I explore the idea that the performative legacy of social death is related to the ability to survive in the liminal space. Survival in this sense is the ability to imagine and then influence cultural legitimacy. Although the slave is a non-person and lives in a state of social death, he is not an outcaste, and as a result he can cross certain boundaries. "The essence of slavery is that the slave in his social death lives on the margin between community and chaos life and death, the sacred and the secular" (Patterson 48). Liminal space is traditionally understood in terms of negation: this act of defining in negation is echoed in post-structuralist performance theory. Performance Studies theorists, such as Judith Butler and Peggy Phelan, engage with Turner's theories and choose to see what he defines as liminal space as a negative, a void, a place where performance constructs self-identity. These scholars understand this void as an embodied place where gender and sexuality are not nascent, but learned and performed. What if instead we chose to define performance and liminality from the perspective of the perennially liminal? If slaves were denied kinship units and communities, if Black existence is rooted in negation, in holocaust, in disappearance, then Black culture itself, rather than being centered on the survival of the diaspora, becomes a diaspora of survival. To survive is to perform, because performances can survive even when people perish.

Although the framing theory of this work is grounded in the social sciences it is also in conversation with Black feminist theory and Performance Studies. Black feminist authors play an invaluable role in the construction of my argument. The bulk of the pertinent theory about Black women's language, bodies, and performance lives in three fields—Black feminism, theatre criticism, and Performance Studies. I focus primarily on

Black feminist theory, theatre criticism, and Performance Studies scholarship which is connected through theories of marginality. bell hooks in her essay "marginality as a site of resistance" is in conversation with Hortense Spillers in her seminal essay "Mama's Baby, Daddy's Maybe" on the role of Black women in the margins, their agency there, and marginality as a site of resistance. I invoke the texts of Black other women theorists: bell hooks in her theorization on marginality, Paula Giddings in *When and Where I Enter*, D. Soyini Madison in her work on Co-Performative Witnessing and Daphne Brooks in her research on Nina Simone and Black female vocality. This cadre of authors is embracing the liminality of Black womanhood and attempting to theorize language and performance around a Black woman's dual experience of strength and suffering. Performance Studies scholar Diana Taylor in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americ*as and Jose Sanchez in *Practicing the Real on the Contemporary Stage* both offer a useful vocabulary for understanding trans-national and trans-generational performance. Collectively they provide a marginal performance theory that locates the place and the performance of liminality, which is useful for understanding the margin as both a place (a stage) and a place in time (the crossing of a threshold or a bridge).

Anne-Marie Bean, African-American theatre historian demonstrates how marginalization has effected the perception of African-American culture and performance in the introduction to her book *A Sourcebook on African-American Performance: Plays, People, Movements (Worlds of Performance)*. Bean marks the various ways that this cultural marginalization has disrupted Black cultural heritage: "One of the predicaments or consequences of this marginalization has been the portrayal of clusters of African-American culture as fragmentary, isolated 'events' usually categorized under the rubric of

'renaissance'" (Bean 1). The result of this assumption of disjunction is cultural natal alienation. The identity of the Black artist is one of constant generation. Therefore, the act of conscious re-generation or invocation of legacy is revolutionary—counter to the dominant narrative. "Another predicament is the preformation of African-American subjectivity within the context of racism (lawful or otherwise), most often manifested in popular culture from minstrelsy to television situation-comedies" (Bean 1-2). This leaves every African-American performance with two revolutionary acts of reclamation to address: whether or not to claim an unbroken legacy and whether or not to address the cultural context of racism.

If Black performance makes the choice to engage in revolutionary action—to acknowledge its unbroken lineage and to counter the racist cultural narrative—the task of performing becomes consciously engaged. What are the tools necessary to create consciously engaged performance?

According to Diana Taylor the protection of the repertoire—embodied knowledge and intangible heritage—are vulnerable and, "Insofar as the materials in the repertoire participate in the production and transmission of knowledge… they warrant protection" (Taylor 30). In thinking about the difficulty of claiming heritage and the vulnerability associated with re-claiming that heritage, it is understandable to be overwhelmed by the task of revolutionary action. Lorraine Hansberry, in the early 1960s imagined this position as a "test of technical skill" that "hangs *between* despair and joy…" (Nemiroff and Hansberry 235).

The technical skill that Hansberry imagines is one that allows the performer to acknowledge the world as it is. She imagined the 1960s artist as one who is able to see and yet not fall prey to delusion or despair. Theorist Jose Sanchez, thinks of this

representative divide as the difference between "reality" and the "real," "… There is an attempt to maintain the difference between 'reality' as consensual or imposed construction, and 'the real,' which resists construction while simultaneously being the material and object representation of itself. Obviously when reality is not consensual, but rather imposed, the real returns in a more violent way in the form of political or traumatic resistance" (Sanchez 1).

Here we arrive, Sister, at the essence of the spirit of your revolutionary witness. Our aesthetic is a violent one because our reality is imposed. In order to exist in the space between *joy* and *despair,* to claim witness consensually, our performance must be a performance of "the real." We represent ourselves in so many different ways. Sanchez speaks of the cultural revolutionaries Artaud and Brecht that "Both attacked the theatre from the inside… and their pursuit of the real led them to search for new models of constructions (or realities) beyond the theater building, as well as beyond the institution, e.g., in the street scenes or rituals integrated in social life (Sanchez 5). If the real is theatre pouring out into the streets and embracing ritual, I submit to you—my witness—that in order to understand our collective performance we must partake in a new type of dramaturgy, one that also pours out into the streets. This conscious dramaturgy then will understand the elements of theatre as constructed and endeavor to deconstruct them in search of a revolutionary real that has the ability to conjure new realities. Let's begin this new dramaturgical understanding in the same place Brazilian activist and Theatre of the Oppressed creator, Augusto Boal begins his revolutionary dramaturgy. "The viewer must be freed of his condition of viewer, of the first oppression that theatre meets" (Sanchez 115). Boal frees his audience by naming them Spect(actors) and implicating them in performative situations of oppression. His Theatre of the Oppressed created real-ness out

of depictions of reality and collectivized the responsibility for de-constructing that reality. Sister, I'm not particularly interested in representing reality, it constructs itself so well. I propose this intervention instead: what if our dramaturgical practice was one of marking our own performances of the real? You are a witness and you bear witness. Therefore, if you see violence or oppression revolution or transcendence and do not say what you have seen you are inherently complicit in the erasure of our joy and our despair. You can see me, I have already told you that I depend on your witness. In seeing me you are my audience and in conveying what I have said you become my witness; a testimony to the fact that I was, am and continue to be "real."

My research methodology is rooted in a praxis based theory that I call conscious dramaturgy. I characterize liminal space as a stage and read testimony as performance of survival and revolutionary change. It is a way of processing, categorizing, analyzing, and performing information commonly understood as a liminal practice. Dramaturgy itself resists a simple definition. It is not one way of seeing or knowing but a complimentary praxis that weds archival knowledge with theatrical performance. As a research method, I find it particularly useful because it is not a silent investigator. Resisting positivist inquiry, dramaturgy is a method where the researcher can sit at the table as a collaborator with truth. I engage with each of the texts directly, inquiring as to how rhetoric is used as a language of survival, how performance is used as an embodiment of survival, and how the space between language and embodiment holds meaning about the nature of survival for the Black woman's body. This inquiry is directed at a greater understanding of how Black women's performances of survival can be reinterpreted as valuable theoretical knowledge in the cannon of resistance to violence and oppression. I want to think about the performance of legitimate identity; the choice to perform an imagined legitimate story

rather than re-create the tragic narrative. I am interested in employing a conscious dramaturgy that advocates for a critical analysis of transformative performance in order to shift identities, realign cultures, and reimagine possibilities rather than reifying or highlighting historical inequities. My goal is to isolate in each performance several recurring theoretical underpinnings that begin to form a Black woman's survival performance ritual. Specifically, I theorize around the act of witnessing and giving testimony as act of individual performativity that enables the possibility of collective survival.

TAKING THE STAGE: NINA AND LORRAINE

A black cat just scurried in front of me. It is hard not to hear Simone's voice in my ear "I think every day is gonna be my last." In this phrase from her protest anthem "Mississippi Goddam" She bears witness to a truth in my life. A fear—not of dying—but of living my last day. When Simone went to visit her friend Lorraine Hansberry on her death bed in December of 1964, she played her a recording of "Evening by the Moonlight" and Hansberry confessed that she wasn't ready to go. In her diary just a eleven months earlier she had planned out her life, the way she dreamed of the year, writing and traveling. She longed to become the person that she imagined herself to be. Instead, she spent the last year of her life—when she wasn't in and out of hospitals—writing and speaking for a revolution that she would never live to see. Some of the last images of Hansberry are of her linked arm in arm with Nina Simone, singing freedom songs in the parlor of a friend. I am stuck by the intimate nature of their pose, as Lorraine sings her weight shifts and the strain of her face is evident. Her mouth has that hollow look that I have seen before in the last months of the lives of one's whom I love whose bodies are being eaten from the inside out. I imagine Nina holding Lorraine in these

moments, a solid force keeping her friend upright when she can no longer trust her legs with the task. They never look at each other during the series of images, but they keep the stance of those who have seen each other many times. The Simone-Hansberry friendship almost always warrants a mention in any print publication about one woman or the other. What fascinates me, Sister, is that their friendship almost never warrants more than a mention. A passing reference to their fondness for each other, Lorraine's commitment to teaching Nina about the movement, Nina making Lorraine the Godmother of her daughter Lisa. Little space is given to the revolutionary fact that two talented Black women, both fiercely independent and self-proclaimed loners, found each other and loved each other. I will spend the rest of this project looking at their friendship through the revolutionary position of our Black female friendship Sister. How did they bear witness to each other? Where did their performance of Black revolution take the conscious dramaturgical turn outside the walls of the theatre and into the streets of America? I mark their friendship as the starting place for understanding patterns of survival in their performances of revolution. When were they doing complimentary work towards the same end and in their synchronicity bearing witness to the real-ness of the other?

Sister, our strength is found when we are able to speak with each other and bear witness to each others real-ness. Every time one Black woman lives or figures out how to survive and even more importantly figures out how to tell the world about it, she isn't telling the world for a sort of acceptance because, who is there to accept her? The Black man is far too busy needing her and rejecting her and the white woman can't imagine that her problems are all together different enough to merit their own narrative. Instead, I submit that she is bearing witnessing to and for her sisters—the kin that were denied to her by natal alienation. Black Women's testimony of survival is a performance for the

other Black women still daring to be alive, to listen and to speak. It is the song of the swan, a terrifying and beautiful call that can be appreciated from the outside, yes, but can only be known by those who have heard it before. They know it because the same call lives at their core. Yearning, clawing, blooming and threatening to eat them from the inside out. Isolation is the enemy of all people, but most violently it is the reality of the Black woman. Wilkerson states that Hansberry saw this too, "Isolation is the enemy of Black writers, Hansberry believed; they are obligated to participate in the intellectual and social affairs of humankind everywhere" (*Sighted Eyes* Wilkerson 9).

The muse that we crave is so often one that looks like ourselves. She is similar maybe in skin tone or hair texture but I recognize that she is altogether different. She challenges the notion of the monolithic Black woman but also reinforces our sense that the experience of Black womanhood is a collective mantel. It is astounding how liberating a practice it is to begin to believe that as a Black woman I can be loved and that I may even love another Black woman, and that could be enough to keep us alive. That I may see in her (you) something that I couldn't see in myself and I might love that thing so intensely. You bear witness to this love like a mirror and in its brilliance you reflect its light and I begin to emanate in a place where I never imagined could be lovely. And in this reflection we become necessary to each other and seen—maybe even for the first time—and all of a sudden we are powerful beyond measure because we have been brave enough to love ourselves the way that we have loved others. We can see each other—Black women are the audience and the performer—so collectively we are witness to and witness for each others lives. This witness is inter-generational—a fight to claim heritage—by nature it is also rooted in reclamation of real kinship.

In the subsequent chapters, Sister, I will move from the tedium of the theoretical into the radical space of the real. In Chapter Two, I mark the cultural shift in 1964—from the political and spiritual agitation and legislation of the 1950s and early 1960s—to the all encompassing national force for change that was the civil rights movement. I seek to re-imagine this moment as a performance of national plural reflexivity. I imagine Nina Simone's performance of "Mississippi Goddam" as the "I want" song for a revolutionary generation. With Nina Simone hired on to shape the tenor of the musical score of the movement, I look to her good friend Lorraine Hansberry as the author. In addition to her revolutionary voice in *A Raisin in the Sun (*first produced in 1959), her text in SNCC's book *The Movement* published by Simon & Schuster in the late summer of 1964 gave rise to a language of outraged Black national identity that Amiri Baraka would mark (in 1986 of *Raisin)* as having the power of, "typify[ing] American Society in a way that reflects more accurately the real lives of the Black US majority than any work that has ever received commercial exposure before it and few if any since" (*Dark Vision* Wilkerson 642). According to Baraka, Hansberry's work has done something that James Baldwin's *Mr. Charlie* and his own *Dutchman* have failed to do. It stood the test of time. It is Lorraine Hansberry's play which, though it seems "conservative" in form and content to the radical petty bourgeoisie (as opposed to revolutionaries), is the accurate telling and stunning vision of the real struggle (*Dark Vision* Wilkerson 642). I am interested Sister, in taking these readings of as Bean would call them "isolated events" and tying them together as collective performances of witness staged on liminal thresholds at times of plural reflectivity. How did Lorraine and Nina become prolific first named performers and also harbingers of revolution? I submit that they did it together, putting into action in their performances notions of the real that are so in sync that I can only imagine that they

consciously committed to bearing witness, not just to the movement but also to each other.

In Chapter Three, I take one phrase "Young, Gifted, and Black" and read its performance on two bodies as an attempt at re-generation as repertoire. Lorraine Hansberry in her final public address spoken to a group of students who had won a national essay competition for the United Negro College Fund. In the speech, "The Nation Needs Your Gifts," she spoke of the role of the negro writer of the future and uttered—perhaps for the first time—the phrase that would set a nation of young people of color ablaze at the possibility of loving themselves. In 1969, Hansberry's ex-husband Robert Nemiroff mounted a production of her unfinished works, personal writings, correspondence and moments from her most popular plays, the title was *To Be Young, Gifted and Black: Lorraine Hansberry in Her Own Words*. Cicely Tyson originated the role of Hansberry and gave the "Your nation Needs Your Gifts" speech. In 1969, Nina Simone, sparked by an article about the production—not the production itself—and the iconic phrase "To Be Young, Gifted, and Black" began writing a song that turned into the anthem for a new movement of revolution, one of Black power and Black love. I critically analyze both performances as acts of radical Black love and a performance of re-generative witnessing. I think of how each woman invites Lorraine Hansberry into her own body in order to continue the work of the author. Finally I imagine, a re-staging of this speech towards yet another generation and how the threshold of today could be an apt stage for a new set of the "young, gifted, and Black" to hear what a marvelous thing it is to be themselves.

Chapter Two: A Show Tune, But the Show Hasn't Been Written

On September 13, 1963, 15 sticks of dynamite placed under the steps of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama incinerated the entire nation. 4 Black girls died, Sister, they died so shortly after they began living and whatever generosity of spirit remained in the American consciousness, whatever innocence or dispassionate indifference that survived in the King, Jr.country, died with them. Everyone saw, and ambivalence was no longer a legitimate choice; either one was or was not with the movement. Nina Simone, as the story goes, was in her Mount Vernon, New York home when she felt the backdraft. Overfull, with so much emotion from the violence surrounding their death's and the assassination of Medgar Evers—and by emotion I mean the rancid bile of irrepressible malcontent that tends to accrue in the bodies of unfree people—that she could barely breathe. The singer who would later tell Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that she was "not non-violent," went to the garage of her home and began desperately fashioning a gun out of scraps of metal.[3] In the oft-repeated apocryphal tale, Simone is cast as a frantic fool. Addled and wild-eyed her husband and manager, Andy Stroud, comes in as the rational voice and reminds her that she doesn't know how to make a gun, but that she does know how to write a song. This exchange becomes the origin story of the song "Mississippi Goddam." As I begin this chapter I'd like to conjecture about the real-ness of this image. I wonder about the picture of the wild-eyed Nina working away in a futile effort to construct a primitive weapon. This reality is romantic, certainly, but also it has the effect of deleting Simone's agency as an artist and as a Black woman. Daphne Brooks marks this song as, "The first 'political anthem' in Nina Simone's evolving career as an activist and agitator, "Mississippi Goddamn"

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[3] See Cohodas

showcases the artist's then newly articulated fearlessness as a songwriter willing to yoke combative political ideology line by line into her composition" (*Triple Play* Brooks 183). How might we too begin to imagine her as someone who deliberately chose to curate the movement?

The clouds were pregnant and angry about it as I barreled north on I-35 to meet my mother and grandmother for lunch in Waco. My Granny Green has more energy than anyone I have ever met and craves adventure like nicotine. She was born in Grand View, Texas in 1932 and at 83 years old is two years younger than Lorraine Hansberry and one year older than Nina Simone would have been had they survived. When I ask her about what it felt like to be Black in Texas, in the 1960s she doesn't conjure images of outright brutality but instead she remembers: small violences, jealous aggression, lascivious assumptions and callous disrespect. It is from this place that I enter "Mississippi Goddam."

The clouds break their water and I think this is as good of a time as any to engage with my primary source research. I click on my bluetooth and that familiar rhythm begins. "The Name of this tune is Mississippi Goddam," One Mississippi. Two Mississippi. Three Mississippi. Four Mississippi. Five Mississippi. Six Mississippi. "And I mean every word of it…" Play. Stop. Rewind. Play. Stop. Rewind. Play. The six-second pause at the beginning of the 1964 Carnegie Hall recording is more than jarring, it is haunting. An unnatural length of time to wait for the second half of a menacing phrase.

To try to understand my subject, I attempt a tool that I learned in my performance ethnography seminar with Dr. Omi Osun Joni L. Jones. I breathe in with Nina, and instead of trying to simply match her timing, I listen to the silence imagining the pause as a statement of its own. I look at the face of the little girl and I think of 11 year old Eunice

and her fervent belief that all performance deserves respect. In the void I hear the laughter of the audience. I see them laughing at her. I can imagine Simone waiting patiently, so that the gravity of the statement might be felt to its full effect. Waiting until the certainty of the crowd is replaced with nervous discomfort. How uncomfortable it must have been that evening in Carnegie Hall in the spring of 1964: The President is dead, the country was on the cusp of war, and Nina Simone wasn't kidding. As I drive down the familiar highway, I imagine what it must have felt like to not know what comes next—on that stage and in the country.

From an early age Simone had a low tolerance for buffoonery, "I grew up assuming that anyone acquainted with social graces would be aware of these basic elements of good conduct" (Cohodas 127). The first manifestation of this expectation was in 1944. At the age of 11 Simone—née Eunice Waymon—gave her first classical piano recital. She performed in the Tryon, North Carolina library and a predominantly white audience attended the concert. Her proud and respectable parents were there and—perhaps because their pride was a temporary distraction from their social station—they sat in the front row of the recital room. As Eunice walked onstage she noticed organizers asking her parents to move from their seats in the front row to the back of the room. She—with the self awareness of a seasoned performer—made it known then and there that in order for her to play the concert as planned they needed to leave her parents be. This performance is another origin story of sorts. An entree into both Simone's difficult temperament and activist spirit. It is in this action, Sister, that I see the seeds of the future Nina in her studio in 1963 penning "Mississippi Goddam" this is an inkling not just of her infamously abrasive personality but of her brand of revolutionary racial politics. The inflamed, unplanned nature of her revolutionary impulse lives hand and hand with her

unwavering dedication to propriety. There is a correct way to be and, because of her talent, when people were in her presence she could demand that they exist on her terms, "That's why I could never get over the shock of coming face to face with a badly behaved audience… and while all entertainers may not be considered artists, they should be accorded the same respect. That's all I ever wanted—Respect" (Cohodas 127).

Lorraine Hansberry, Nina Simone's friend and mentor in the revolution, also has a mythical origin story that foretold her dedication to justice and revolution. Hansberry described herself as being born "on the Southside of Chicago. I was born Black and a female. I was born in a depression after one world war and came into adolescence during another" (Hansberry 20). Coming of age during depression left a particularly strong impression on Hansberry. She was fiercely proud as a Black person and as a woman but she did not see her particular suffering as exceptional. Instead of heading toward entrenchment in her particular pain she most often found empathy "for the desires and frustrations of her people, and a respect for their beauty and vigor" (*Sighted Eyes* Wilkerson 9). It was this respect for humanity and its frustrations that lead young Hansberry to the knee of a neighbor who, when she was eleven, taught her about radical politics and communism (*Sighted Eyes* Wilkerson 9).

In 1963, Chicana activist and SNCC organizer Elizabeth "Betita" Sutherland Martinez reached out to Lorraine Hansberry to author the text of a documentary photo book. Martinez advocated for the publication to her employer Simon & Schuster. In an interview Martinez looks back on this moment with pride, "I did a book I'm very proud of, actually, in 1963, called *The Movement*. It was a photographic book about the civil rights movement. It was a beautiful book" (Ross 40). Though Lorraine was already quite sick, she agreed to pen the text to accompany principally SNCC photographer Danny

Lyons' images from the South among others photographers work from around the country. Martinez, remembers the project as a beginning of sorts, "So this is way back. And so, that was kind of the first time I did something like that, and I've been kind of plugging away. I guess it's just the idea that pictures with a certain number of words to go with them can educate people in a good way, and can move them forward and maybe even inspire them" (Ross 40). The idea of a few words accompanied by images as a source of inspiration is a familiar one. Especially to Hansberry, who as a playwright subsisted on the relationship between text and image and the power that evocation could have on a public. Hansberry had an opportunity to put into action her waning revolutionary spirit, and what she could no longer do with her body—and perhaps what she no longer was convinced that she would like to do with her body—she performed with her words. Her role in creating *The Movement,* I submit, was a revolutionary act of witnessing one that marked the time, the place and the people that would shape and then survive the Civil Rights movement. I argue that her text put in dialogue with Danny Lyons images and her friend Nina Simone's anthem "Mississippi Goddam" was the dramaturgical research that informed the performative possibility of surviving the Jim Crow south. Perhaps most poignantly Hansberry and Simone articulated a vision of surviving that was at once passionately radicalized and deeply nationalistic. By invoking the generational nature of Blackness and its relationship to Americanness they fought against the natal alienation intrinsic in their marginal identity and performed an all but unimaginable but ultimately timely truth, a Black lineage of survival.

In this chapter I attempt to re-stage a performance on a precipice. I imagine the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church as a rupture that tore open an already compromised seam. In its place a threshold of reflective opportunity just big enough for

our country to fit through emerged. I understand this threshold as a type of gruesome stage, a platform on which many performed—what Victor Turner terms "Plural reflexivity"—a collective looking back, around and forward at who we as a country were, are and might become. On this type of liminal stage, revolution is in the Boalian sense rehearse-able. Bodies that might otherwise fall victim to easy abjection can and do speak truth to the masses.

I now attempt to re-stage and enter myself, or us Sister, into a conversation between Hansberry and Simone. The two women were known to "… never talk about men or clothes, it was always Marx, Lenin and revolution" (Simone and Cleary 40). I examine six images from Hansberry's book *The Movement*, the accompanying text, and the 1964 live recording of "Mississippi Goddam" as if I excavate a single document, one intimate conversation. I give as much credence to intertextuality—both subtext and context—in the images and recordings as I give to the text itself. In this section my dramaturgical pursuit has unearthed a simple narrative mission. Simone and Hansberry, very much along party lines with the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee have conjured a narrative of opportunity based on history and urgency. They focus on the shared history of Blacks and whites as Americans and they capitalize on that shared identity to emphasize the urgent need for revolution. I read each moment as if they are talking to each other in whispers dreaming about staging a production, one that is both timely and has a sense of its own historical import.

The identity of the Black woman had been voluntarily and involuntarily carrying the weight of Civil Rights resistance for so long—in Little Rock, in Montgomery, in New Orleans and in Sunflower County, Mississippi—that the performance of resolute martyr

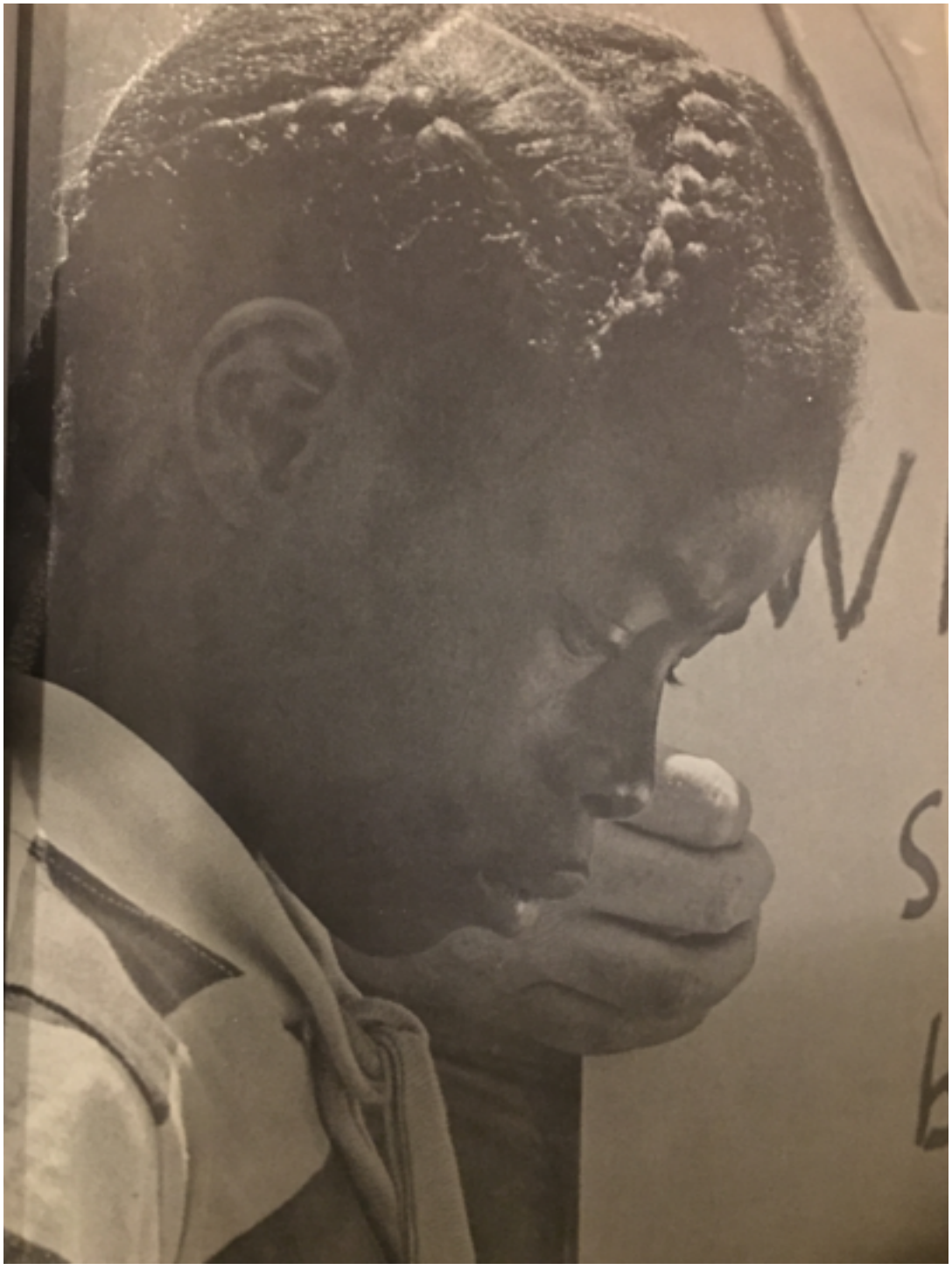

Figure 1: Roy De Carva. New York City.

during this time is a ubiquitous and easily recognizable one.[4] So much so, that in May 2013 President Barack Obama awarded, Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson and Carol Denise McNair a Congressional Gold Medal by for the role that their deaths played in catalyzing the Civil Rights movement and the Civil Rights act of 1964. However, I submit, that Black women and their bodies are more than the kindling for change. I challenge the pervasive notion that our role in history is one of principally quiet courage and determination and I imagine that among the most pivotal roles played by Black Woman in this theater of precipice were roles of conscious co-performative witness. I imagine the role that Nina Simone and Lorraine Hansberry played as each others co-performative witnesses, both undertaking a political performance that dramaturgically anticipated with urgency the imagined generational possibility of Freedom Summer. In their imagining they authored a future, past the violence of that season and conjured the possibility of survival for their people.

EVERYBODY KNOWS ABOUT MISSISSIPPI

Picket lines

School boycotts

They try to say it's a communist plot

All I want is equality

for my Sister my brother my people and me ("Mississippi")

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[4] This statement is in reference to the students who integrated Little Rock Central High School, To JoAnn Robinson, Claudette Colvin and Rosa Parks the women who suffered for and executed the Montgomery Bus Boycotts, to Ruby Bridges who integrated her elementary school in New Orleans after the Supreme court ruling Brown V. Board of Education, and to Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom Fighter and Orator, a sharecropper from Sunflower County Mississippi.

> "TODAY'S OBJECTIVE: before she is an adult, FREEDOM" (*Movement* Hansberry 42)

Lorraine Hansberry was born into a comfortable middle class household but according to her biographer Margaret Wilkerson, "The comfort to which she was born is only relative when one looks at the whole of American life; it did not isolate her from the struggles and the anger of poor people (*Sighted Eyes* Wilkerson 9). Hansberry—and Simone's—empathetic artistic enterprise was not just the personal project of two likeminded women. The children of the Black middle class were waking up all over the country and realizing that not everyone had made it out or through in the way that their parents generation had. Many felt the call to take action, even "Angela Davis's earliest experiences involved stealing change from the kitchen cabinet for her schoolmates who couldn't afford school lunches… 'It seemed to me that if there were hungry children, something was wrong and if I did nothing about it, I would be wrong too'" (Giddings 272). This ernest desire for total racial uplift—rather than the assimilation of a talented percentage—is visible on the face of the child in Figure 1. Categorically this is an image of a little girl. Her gaze is pointed downward, and she has one neatly braided plait that has fallen over her eye. Without looking at the index of the book an untrained eye might assume that this is a photo of Ruby Bridges integrating her school in New Orleans. She also favors a young Eunice Waymon, approaching the Tryon Library piano bench. It is hard to imagine that as Hansberry wrote about freedom in this child's lifetime she didn't see herself and her classmates in the nappy roots, full lips, and flared nostrils of the girl in the image. Its easy to forget with the salve of time and when talking about National legislation, like supreme court decision *Brown V. Board of Education*, that it was a little girl (not unlike the girls who began this chapter) who broke the 60 year old color line drawn through the city of New Orleans and across this country. For Hansberry however,

the image of Ruby Bridges was fresh and poignant. The text of this book rarely deviates from a small matter of fact type face that cooly conveys the authors meaning. Over pages of lynched and burned bodies and school children in jail Hansberry's tone does not change. However, this image struck a chord—either with the author or her editor—her caption shouts, "FREEDOM".

Compositionally, this photo is distinct from most images of the child crusaders of the Civil Rights era. For instance, most photos of Bridges and her iconic walk into her integrated school are from a distance, her head held high, her bright white shoes in lock step with the military guards assigned to escort her. It is easy to forget that Bridges was not a solider. The little girl is this image is a revolutionary thing, because it is hard to imagine her as anything else. The intimate angle, freshly scrubbed cheeks, delicately furrowed brow, and carefully parted hair all reinforce her innocence. She is just a child. However, Hansberry is quick to remind us that she too is a foot solider, drafted into the same army that required Hansberry to complete her middle school homework guarded by her mother who patrolled their home with a shotgun, guarding against their angry white neighbors, as the Hansberry's attempted to integrate an all-white neighborhood. Hansberry, both reifies and reckons with the image of this child soldier. The mission, according to Hansberry, is to make sure that she is "free by tomorrow." Tomorrow—as the ever-present future—becomes an intergenerational fight for freedom.

"Picket lines, School boycotts…" Nina Simone picks up where Hansberry stops. Picket lines, typically the work of adults, but in this image we can see that the child is standing next to a picketer, someone holding a sign against injustice. School boycotts are also the purview of the young. The sit-ins of the early sixties and later the Freedom Summer riders were mostly in their teens and early twenties. Demanding freedom for

these young bodies *and* with these young bodies was an acknowledgement by both artists that the fight for revolution would be waged by those most vulnerable to violence. In their revolutionary imaginary Hansberry and Simone also saw that the most vulnerable bodies might also be the most capable bodies for revolution—both practically and performatively.

Paula Giddings in her seminal tome *When and Where I Enter* (1984) recounts a violent reality for some living in the South during the unrest surrounding the Civil Rights movement, "Mrs. Marion King, wife of one of the local leaders, was knocked unconscious by deputy sheriffs…She was pregnant at the time and a few months later gave birth to a stillborn child. Still, she felt that more good than bad had come out of the movement in Albany. Her children had witnessed a courageous battle, and Marion King thanks SNCC workers: 'you have given my children something that cannot be taken away from them'" (Giddings 283).

"Something that cannot be taken away from them," legacy, freedom, pride? Whatever gift Mrs. King spoke of, she was proud to be able to pass it down to her children, an intergenerational gift in an African-American kinship unit is not a privilege to be taken lightly. "Mississippi Goddam" is in a way the battle cry of a people who were already sick and tired of being sick and tired. A people who carried exhaustion in their bodies and passed that exhaustion down to their children who—when they did survive the womb—were born exhausted. The malcontent that Simone tapped into was a uniting rallying cry. "Mississippi" is a call to the recognition of kinship and the responsibility of that kinship: "All I want is equality, for my Sister, my brother, my people, and me" ("Mississippi").

Figure 2: Danny Lyon. Atlanta, Georgia.

But that's just the trouble "do it slow"

Washing the windows "do it slow"

Picking the cotton "do it slow"

You're just plain rotten "do it slow"

You're too damn lazy "do it slow"

The thinking's crazy "do it slow"

Where am I going What am I doing

I don't know

I don't know

Just try to do your very best

Stand up be counted with all the rest… ("Mississippi")

The bodies are in sharp relief. They are marching towards something, or away from something else, either way they are on a bridge and they are moving—Black, White, male, female—together. What did integration mean without power? "'The kids tried the establishment methods' said Ella Baker, 'and they tried at the expense of their lives…So they began to look for other answers'" (Giddings 296). The looking that Ella Baker signifies in this statement is complemented by Hansberry's caption of the image, "Everywhere across the Southern landscape young negroes picked up the aspirations of their fathers, rekindled it, and started marching" (Hansberry 42). Hansberry felt a deep connection to the movement and it's workers and in them she found hope not just for the South but also for humanity: "[I] have also got to meet some of the Freedom Ride leaders out of the South. What truly extraordinary young people! They make one almost blind

with re-suspicions that the human race really is? What?? Possible, I guess…" (*Dark Vision* Wilkerson 646).

"Do it slow," I imagine the pace of these young people across as steady, the steady melodic movement of young bodies in a rush—moving every which way but slow. Containing the frenetic energy of youth has long been the pastime of bureaucrats and statesmen. They rarely succeed, especially when the moral certitude of youth is bolstered by the judicious arch of history. "The events of the late fifties were especially riveting for children of the Black Bourgeoisie. Most had grown up in material comfort… no wonder that many had come to firm faith in the American dream… As they came of age the shock of realizing that not all Blacks had been lifted upon the wave of postwar affluence was a rude one" (Giddings 271). The rekindling also came with a reimagining, a Black feminist sentiment—cemented under the tutelage of Ella Baker—this is a generation that moves in a pack, weary of isolation, committed to lifting as they rise.

The idea of being talented enough or gifted enough to distinguish oneself from other Black people was an antiquated and tired notion by 1964. Nina Simone knew intimately that she was no longer set a part because of her musical gift. She had learned that in her last months as Eunice Waymon when the Curtis Institute of Music rejected her application for admission, "…But Eunice was convinced that an unknown Black girl from a small southern town never had a chance. It was actually a comforting thought, because putting the pieces together this way meant it wasn't a question of talent. Her rejection was based on the immutable factor of skin color, something she had no control over" (Cohodas 55). The bridge of "Mississippi" is my favorite part of the song, and in every rendition I've ever heard the bridge takes the audience to a different destination. During a 1965 performance in Antibes, France she looks at her band, all Black men

dressed in Tuxedos as they sing the refrain "Do it Slow" as the bridge comes to a close, her weary "I don't know, I don't know" signals a lost Simone. Where is she going? It is the summer after Freedom Summer and the country has manifested her vision of discontent, her hair begins to frizz at the slicked down root and her rhinestone lined eyelashes are cast downward. What *is* she doing? The weight of her responsibility as a unique voice in the movement—Dick Gregory, describes "Mississippi Goddam" as a song that only a Black woman could write and perform—is beginning to show (Miss Simone). In Holland, also in 1965, Simone wears a mesh body suit and a short afro. This time the bridge is syncopated. It is driving. Assertive and resolute she begins the song, "Going home now, going home now…" over and over again she sings about where she is going and by the time the dutch audience arrives with her at the bridge they have gone home with her, through the terroristic reign of George Wallace and they sing along. The nameless faceless audience, like silhouettes across a bridge, going home and refusing to do it slowly.

In this photo each body is anonymous, unlike some of Danny Lyons iconic photographs such as the young women in the jail in Leesburg, Georgia, the bodies in the photograph are de-raced and de-gendered. The possibility of performing a best that can be measured against all of the rest, outside of race, sex, socioeconomic status or even geography is one that Hansberry imagines on a bridge as an act of legacy and Simone sings through a bridge as an act of defiance.

YA'LL THOUGHT I WAS KIDDING DIDN'T YOU?

Twenty years later in 1984, Simone performed a version of "Mississippi Goddam" in medley with Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's "Alabama Song," from the opera *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahogany*. Simone has written that the "Alabama Song" was an

influence in the creation of "Mississippi Goddam" (*Triple Play* Brooks 182). Daphne Brooks examines the relationship between the two songs in her article "Nina Simone's Triple Play." Brooks engages with the epic and performative nature of Simone's work, and critically analyzes three performances of "Mississippi Goddam," the March 1964 Carnegie Hall recording, a performance of the song in 1968—just a few days after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—at the Westbury Music Festival and the performance in 1984 at Ronnie Scott's in London where she performs "Mississippi Goddam" in medley with "Alabama Song." Brooks is primarily concerned with the sonic quality of each performance and the "Socio-cultural transgressiveness *in* song," by exploring the phonic influence of Brecht and Weill, Brooks connects Simone to a lineage of protest song outside of the homogenous legacy of Black female vocality. She is especially in conversation with the alienation that Simone relishes in her version of epic performance. Instead of pathologizing her idiosyncratic staged presence Brooks reads a timely and tactical political performance in each version of the song.

"This is a show tune, but the show hasn't been written for it yet." Those words spoken menacingly to the audience at Carnegie Hall carried as much weight as anything else she sung that night. The bill that evening was anything but her standard fare. Simone, having made clear earlier that month at the Village Gate in Greenwich Village, NYC that she was decidedly with the movement, had an agenda. She meant to harness her power on this national stage. Early in the evening she sang a rendition of "I love you Porgy," Nina had established her theatrical presence, in the innately American Gershwin brothers. By performing a version of the Brecht/Weill song from *Threepenny Opera* "Pirate Jenny," Nina distinguished herself from the Gershwin's Bess as a malcontented mystical character, preparing her revenge against her oppressors. In this performance she

established her theoretical groundings in the Marxist revolutionary voice of Brecht. Finally, In her performance of "Mississippi Goddam" she conjures both of those identities and establishes herself as the author of an unfinished "anti-opera"[5] A harbinger of a future truth, mystically revealed in the wake of a tragedy she is able to pre-suppose the freedom of her people.

Dramaturgically, for Brecht, all theatre should make a distinction between "someone who sees and someone who looks critically" (Trencsényi 117). Brecht believed that in theatre aesthetics must be sacrificed in service of ideology and the dangerous ideology of uncertain times required a different type of art making (Trencsényi 120). For Brecht this type of different art was an exploration of the "real" in the form of the Epic Theatre. A theatre meant to jar its audience rather than provide them an escape. The dramaturgy of Brecht is informed by these two ideas: 1) The conviction that art can be purposeful and is politically responsible to be acting toward to purpose of public interest. 2) Theatre can be used as a means to better understand the processes of human societies. He believed that the defining characteristic of an age demanded a theatre that also spoke to that character, e.g., a scientific society demands a scientific theatre.

If dramaturgy is the art of understanding, a hermeneutical pursuit, then we can understand Nina Simone's call back to what she calls "Moon over Alabama" or "The Alabama Song" as a way into understanding her dramaturgical vision for the sound of revolution (Trencsényi 128).

Brooks, sees Simone's work in conversation with Brecht as an anti-anti-opera: "Simone's invocation of their work, I argue, is a project less invested in remaining faithful to the literal tenets of Brechtian ideology and more focused on producing

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[5] See Brooks *Triple Play* for more information on the term anti-opera

interpretative deformations of Brechtian text that paradoxically generate an alienation effect" (*Triple Play* Brooks 182). Brooks makes an assertion here, which is particularly useful in our beginning to understand Simone's project of revolution. Firstly, she (Simone) works in paradox. That is, alienation isn't found in the jarring of the audience but in the hypotonic melody they are forced to live with. Catchy melodies alongside heartbreaking lyrics rather than the distorted discomfortable sound of the Brecht/Weill opera. Second, in the same phrase, Brooks highlights Simone's nationalistic impulse, "Her work dares audiences to see and hear "America" differently and on a different frequency" (*Triple Play* Brooks 182). This marks her audience not just as revolutionaries or Black Americans but as a ubiquitous "American" audience that Simone, in her wide reaching appeal, could cast a spell over and like her eleven year old self demand whatever she considered to be the best that they have to offer.

Hansberry, also imagines her words in conversation with Brecht, and she too imagines a double blind version of the Anti-Opera. "Ours, I suspect, will be a theater *primarily* of emotion. The converse of Brecht: let us perhaps allow our audiences to become *so* spent in the amphitheater that the shall welcome the intellectuality of the pamphlet and the debate…" (Nemiroff and Hansberry 219).

This is important in Simone's performance of "Mississippi" because in her marking, or reading, of the audience she engages them as both Intimates and Americans. In Hansberry's eyes the theatre is a place that calls these intimate country men out of the comfort of the theatre and into the political agency of witness. In this way witnessing is an epic device that can be used in the same way that Brecht used alienation, in "Alabama Song." Though Simone, in her revolutionary impulse, goes beyond alienation. She does not alienate through distance, she holds her audience so close that they begin to be unable

to distinguish her pain from their own. Alienation, as an epic device, worked for Brecht because audiences did not forget that they were watching theatre. Simone's performance erases the theatre all together and her audiences must see with her when they see her. They are implicated instead of alienated. In addition to Simone's relationship with German Epic Theatre as a revolutionary form, I'd like to call back to her Southern church revival circuit roots to begin to understand the depth of her commitment to witnessing.

LORD HAVE MERCY ON THIS LAND OF MINE

From the age of three Eunice Waymon showed promise as a piano prodigy. Her mother, a Methodist minister in training, often had Eunice play with the choir on Sundays. Later the Waymon family would recall how Sunday always lasted from sun up to long past sun down. Simone's relationship to ecclesiastic witnessing was a profound one. From "He changed my name" to "Sinnerman" she continued to integrate gospel anthems into her work long after she herself began to have doubts about her faith. Her piano playing had always marked her as somewhat different, "It was her musical genius that also set her apart from her family as well as her peers. 'I knew,' she observes, 'I wasn't like everybody else…'" (Simone and Cleary 25). When she began playing classical piano with Mrs. Muriel Mazzanovich, "Mrs. Mazzy" on the white side of town, the piano—an instrument that had brought her closer to her mother and her musical siblings—began to set her a part, "'No one in the family,' she continues, 'knew how isolated my music made me'" (Simone 30). For Simone, faith was a deeply communal sentiment that represented a past full of kinship and love and cut into the loneliness of performance. In her 1961 recording *Live at the Village Gate,* in the song "Children go where I send you," she calls out to her audience, "have you ever been in a revival meeting?… Well, you are in one right now." By invoking the communal nature of the

revival she brought her audience into the performance, not as dispassionate watchers—free to laugh, or stand, or carry on—but as witnesses—complicit and engaged—to her performance. Both Simone and her audiences found freedom when she invited them to become a part of the performing counterpublic.

The discourse of the Black church was not the exclusive purview of Nina Simone, many artists used gospel music as a backdrop for their entry into mainstream popular culture or protest song. Fannie Lou Hamer and Bernice Johnson Reagan become famous for their Gospel songs that served as protest anthems for radical action in the South. "It was song, the heart of Black cultural expression, that provided the cohesive force… Albany became known as the 'singing movement' and it was the rich, darkly timbre voice of Bernice Reagan, an Albany State College student who joined SNCC, that evoked the resonances of centuries old memories and strengths" (Giddings 183). Paula Giddings marks that Black women were overwhelmingly responsible for, "Both moral and social authority when controversial decisions had to be made" (Giddings 284). This is in reference to the Black church's volunteer involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and its matrilineal tradition. The Black Southern church was the frontline of the movement, which meant that most of the foot soldiers of the movement came from the church. Women made up most of the southern Black church, so most of the foot soldiers of the movement were Black women. What reading Simone's legacy of witnessing affords us is the opportunity to read intertextual meaning in her 1964 performance of "Mississippi" that would have only been legible to the foot soldiers of the revolution, i.e., other Black women. Most would have been exposed to her performance by way of pirated radio and albums shipped from friends and relatives in the North (Street 88).

The theorists engaged in this text have something to say about this performance of intertextual meaning, in what follows I am in conversation with three. Performance Studies theorist Dwight Conquergood names these intertextual performances, performances of "subjugated knowledges." "Subjugated knowledges have been erased because they are illegible; they exist by and large as active bodies of meaning outside of books eluding the forces of inscription that would make them legible and thereby legitimate" (Conquergood 2002, p. 146). Brooks thinks about a similar concept in relation to Mae Henderson's reading of intertextual sonic meaning as a, "… Form of 'disruption,' as Mae Henderson contends of Black women's ability to speak in tongues, can be read as 'departure or a break with conventional semantics and/or phonetics.' It is a kind of 'rupture… followed by' a sounding 'of the dominant story' or 'displacement' that shifts attention 'to the other side of the story'" (DeFrantz 212). Simone Biographer Nadine Cohodas sums up Simone's spiritual longing in these words: "On that stage in Montgomery, long since transformed into Nina Simone, she sang 'Mississippi Goddam,' her litany of racial injustice and a signal that she, too, had found her spiritual assignment: to use her talent for the singular cause of freeing her people and not incidentally herself" (Cohodas 4).

If Simone is communicating intertextually, then it follows that she is taking care to be in communication with a specific audience—other Black women are her own corroborative co-performative witnesses. I submit that her ideal witness is one able to hear her on multiple levels and one that speaks to her in return. One that can hear the V-effect in "Mississippi" as clearly as she hears revival. Even more so, that witness is able to respond in kind with her own testimony to the truth of Simone's revolutionary performance of survival. Of the many revolutionaries that Nina Simone had in her life—

including James Baldwin, Malcolm X and Langston Hughes—only one woman in particular would she remember decades later as someone with whom she could enjoy "Real girls' talk."

I DON'T TRUST YOU

> Oh but this whole country is full of lies
>
> You're all gonna die and die like flies
>
> I don't trust you any more
>
> You keep on saying, "Go slow!"
>
> "Go slow!" ("Mississippi")
>
> "Who can look upon the turbulence in men's eyes and pretend he has witnessed contentment—or even resignation?" (*Movement* Hansberry 32)

There is something eerily familiar about this next image Sister. It is one distinctly of the past; it is also an image so present that it might well be design inspiration for "Formation" Beyoncé's most recent music video.[6] Hansberry executes so adeptly an emotional response to these bodies of state violence, at once saintly and remarkably cheeky. She pities them because she believes "[T]he men in helmets are from a class of Southerners who are themselves victims of a system that has used them and their fathers before them for generations" (Hansberry 68). And in that pity she takes away their power. By acknowledging the systemic nature of violence against white bodies she equates them with Black bodies. For the white Southerner this was an equation paradoxically integral to the execution of Jim Crow laws but also unfathomable in daily life. To recognize white

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[6] Sister, I am completing this project in the weeks after the surprise release of one of the most important pop-culture protest songs of a generation. For more context please see Beyoncé's "Formation."

Figure 3: Frank Dandridge. Cambridge, Maryland.

southerners as oppressed economically by the laws that they depended on to uplift them racially Hansberry took away perhaps the most valuable weapon of the violent south, the myth that it might ever rise again. Simone, pleads for mercy on a land that she claims to be her own. Again, in the 1965 version of "Mississippi" recorded live in Holland—no studio recording of the song exists—she begins with that wailing refrain: "Going home now! Going home now! Going home now!" What home is she referring to, when she belongs neither here nor there? The United States—and in later iterations the entire world—drew the wrath of Simone and one can imagine the picture of these men standing jauntily with their helmets cocked and their guns drawn receiving the curse, "You 're all gonna die and die like flies," "We all gonna get it in due time." Simone and Hansberry read these men like ball children, they even read their daddies. What a

powerful act of revolution to recognize that time works with and for and against and on all people. The men in this image, cannot make the revolution go slow, and in fact it is it's swiftness which will condemn them in history as the iconography of oppressor.

In this moment I'd like to point out that for this exercise I forewent the exploration of some of the more explicitly violent and traumatic images in *The Movement*. The pages are full of hateful, harmful photos of Black bodies being destroyed. Again this literal kindling of the revolution is evocative yes, and no examination of the movement would be complete without coming face to face with the worst demons of our humanity. Hansberry and Simone both have work and words that lend themselves to graphic explorations of the violent margins of society. "Old Jim Crow," "The Ballad of Hollis Brown," "Go Limp," even the "Backlash Blues" are more explicit lamentations. I am interested in finding the future tense in the creative and revolutionary impulse of these two women. Yes, they mark the past, but in "Mississippi Goddam," and in *The Movement* that demarcation is always in service of a yet to be created future, an impulse—either to seize the present or violently reject the past—that results in a re-imagination of the possible. This is what Hansberry understands as realism (Nemiroff and Hansberry 236). She hopes to find the art in the ordinary and the potential in the imaginary

"This is a show tune, but the show hasn't been written for it yet" (Mississippi Goddam 1964). Why a show tune? A show tune, unlike other popular musical forms of the day, comes with both a sense of class and racial consciousness. It is not a democratic art. Simone who had already played a Gershwin number and a Brecht/Weill one knew that her mostly white Carnegie Hall audience would assume that a show tune would be a song written for them and mostly likely about them. A show tune that was about both Blackness and America was an unexpected proposition. Though Hansberry had broken

many barriers on Broadway it would still be over a decade before a Black Musical won a Tony.[7] By claiming the lineage of the show tune Simone was both lulling her audience into a comfortable assumption and re-claiming a Black performance history that included shows like "In Dahomey" and "Shuffle Along" which served to define the genre. The cost associated with going to see a show was not negligible. A top ticket could run as much as ten dollars, for comparison, the paperback version of *The Movement* sold for $2.95 and a Black southern sharecropper featured in its pages is reported as earning only $2.50 a day. A week's wages would not buy him a ticket to a Broadway show, much less a night on the town in New York City. Simone was acutely aware that her show tune would have to conjure its own witnesses, an audience that the crowd in Carnegie Hall couldn't imagine if they tried.

WE'VE LOST OUR DEAR OLD MAMA

> Lord have mercy on this land of mine
>
> We all gonna get it in due time
>
> I don't belong here
>
> I don't belong there
>
> I've even stopped believing in prayer
>
> Don't tell me
> I tell you
>
> Me and my people just about due I've been there so I know
>
> They keep on saying, "Go slow!" ("Mississippi")

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[7] *The Wiz* won the Tony Award for Best Musical in 1975. Charlie Smalls, the lyricist and composer, was an African-American theatre artist.

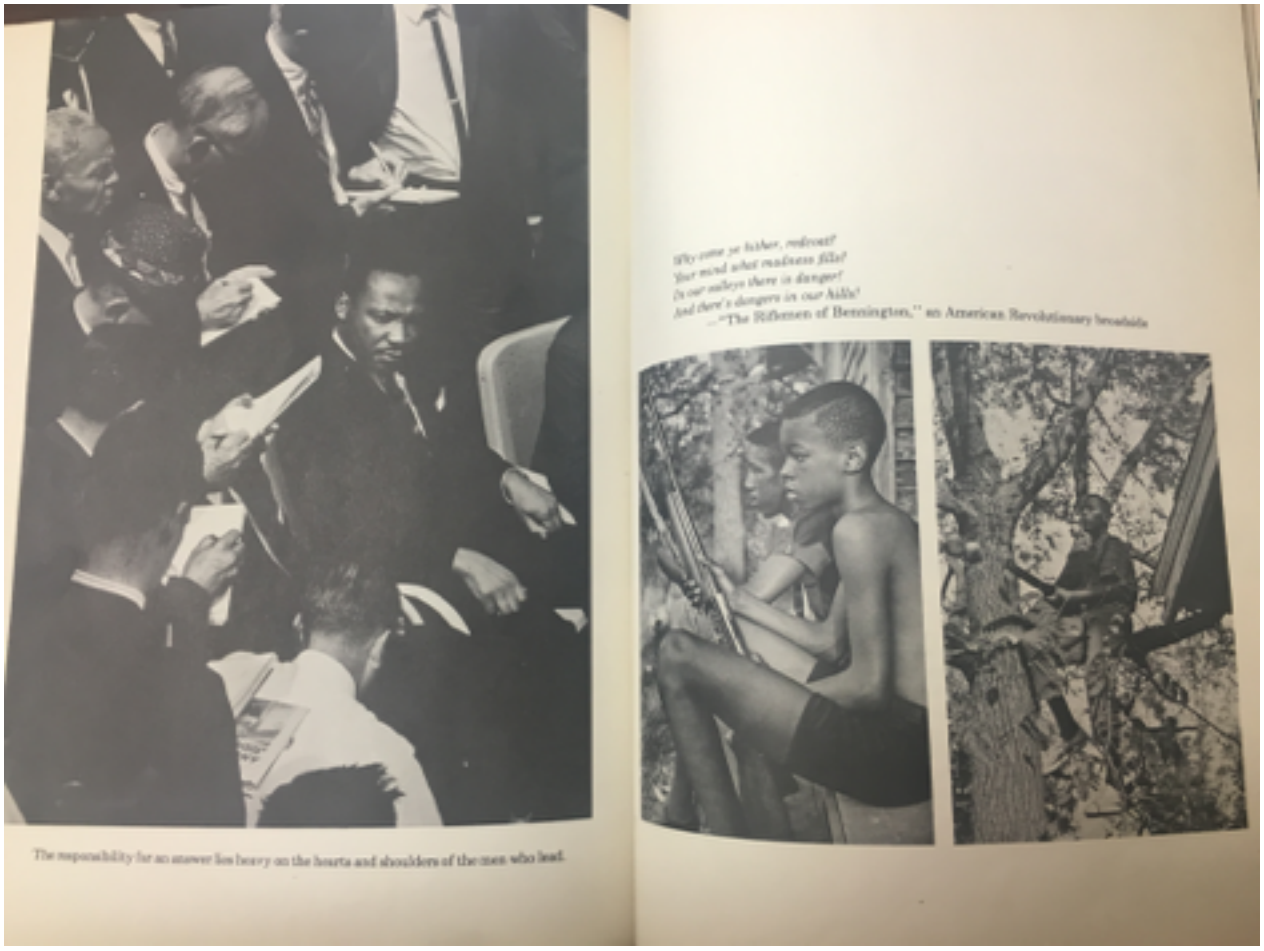

Figure 4: Left Image: Danny Lyon Birmingham Alabama. In the courtyard of a motel, one Black from the bombed church Martin Luther King holds a Press conference. Right Image: Norris McNamara. On the steps of an outside, Freedom House in Monroe North Carolina. This is the Town where Robert Williams, Formerly of the NAACP, asserted the Negro's right to armed self-defense.

Why come ye hither, Redcoat?

What mind your madness fills?

In our valleys there is danger!

And there's danger in our hills!

"The Riflemen of Bennington," an American Revolutionary Broadside

(*The Movement* Hansberry 97)

> In the aftermath of the Sunday School bombing, twenty-million people being to ask with a new urgency: Is nonviolence the way? The responsibility for an answer lies heavy on the hearts and shoulders of the men who lead. (*The Movement* Hansberry 95-96)

In conclusion, I examine the three images above in conversation with the corresponding quoted text. The images are laid out on a two page spread toward the end of the book. The text is performed on the 1964 Carnegie Hall album with such violence that Simone ceases to sing during these stanzas and begins to moan. The three images are directly related to the response of the country to the Birmingham, Alabama bombings that killed those little girls, Sister. So, it seems, I end this chapter where it began, with an image of Nina Simone, frantically making a song. On one side of her, perhaps on a television screen, sits Civil Rights icon Martin Luther King, Jr. He is surrounded by reporters. He looks burdened by the weight of his responsibility. On her other side, two little boys sitting in trees. Maybe they are her neighbors in her upper middle class suburb of Mount Vernon, New York. They carry guns, rifles or bb guns it doesn't matter. The guns they hold will get the job done. They are hunters and they are in perfect position to catch their prey. The man on the screen is fighting with everything he has to keep his people from being hunted. He is losing that fight. The little boys in the trees, are shoeless and shirtless and free. They are the ones to be feared. Which muse does Nina invoke? She goes back and forth for a while, "I don't belong here, I don't belong there." She seeks God, in her piano and gives up. Instead she finds Brecht. "we've lost our dear old, mama" and "we are just about due" so "show us the way to the next little girl, show us the way to the next little dollar, show us the way to the next whiskey bar…" and whatever you do,

don’t go slow, because there is danger in those hills. Everyone saw, and ambivalence was no longer a legitimate choice; either one was or was not with the movement.

Chapter Three: Doubly Dynamic

IF ANYTHING SHOULD HAPPEN

Dear Sister,

As a recently invented person you may not have yet begun to imagine what it is to be re-invented. However, as a person who is conjured both Black and a woman it is never too early to begin preparing for your death. Your mortality, Sister, is an inevitability. The death of your story—the performative mark that you left on the world—is a probability, erasure is a hard truth for people like us. Here is the amazing thing, Sister, even though you and I will die, and though it is in no way assured, our legacy can live on. Because, for subjected identities legacy is a collective responsibility. As a community, a counterpublic, you and I can do together what we cannot do alone. This is why our witnessing each other is so important. By bearing witness to the tangible realness of each other we create a legacy and when we remember each other, and perform that memory, we then become the revolutionary embodiment of survival. So when I am gone and they tell you that I never could exist, not fully, not the way you imagine me to be; if you speak what I have spoken and sing while you imagine my face in your mind's eye I live on, in you, and through you and with you and if only one of us survives, we all survive.

In this final chapter, I attempt a conscious dramaturgical re-reading of Lorraine Hansberry's legacy by examining two different tactics of legacy building catalyzed by Hanberry's 1964 speech to the three winners of the United Negro College Fund essay contest, first as the title essay in the Broadway play *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* and later in the 1969 song written by her friend Nina Simone. Through the lens of marginal resistance I mark the ways in which the staged performance of Hansberry's spoken text and later Nina Simone's popular Black liberation song of the same title gave a new

"margin identified" perspective on the Black experience and celebrated the role that that experience had to play in a greater national Black identity.

In addition to the performances of Hansberry's memory, I examine my own legacy making work. In this examination, I am looking for an answer, both historically accurate and pertinent to my current praxis. You see, Sister, I am interested in how one successfully makes a performance of memory. Moreover, how does one successfully make a performance that centers the memory of Black women? Here I confess the motivation behind this inquiry: I have tried and failed many times at making performances of memory, performances that center Black women's memory and the memory of Black women. It is in this chapter that I mark that failure by bearing witness to its role in my performative history in order to move my practice forward and to begin conjuring what performative resistance from the margin feels like. So, I am deeply invested in how we as people—and especially as Black women—look back at the lives of the people that we have loved (whether or not we know them). How we look at their passion and, in the case of Hansberry, revolutionary spirit. How do we commemorate the intimate moments that have marked and changed us as a culture? Further, in that looking back how might we do more than commemorate? I am interested in how that work is an invocation, re-generation, and progenitor of revolution. By exploring two commemorative offerings to the memory of Lorraine Hansberry—one by her ex-husband and one by her dear friend—I look for the patterns that emerge as a map for the possibility of performing survival by embodying the dead. I am inspired by the words of Hansberry, who believed that her revolutionary spirit was only one part of a small whole and that after she left the work would live on:

> If anything should happen—before 'tis done—may I trust that all commas and periods will be placed and someone will complete my thoughts—This last should

> be the least difficult—since there are so many who think as I do. (Nemiroff and Hansberry 265)

I attempt to mark a performative moment where a Black woman succeeded in speaking for herself and ensuring generational survival. Simone constructed a performance of Black resistance from the margin. In the aftermath of my own failure at libratory art making, I argue that this purposeful performance is theoretically important on three levels. It represents the opportunity to perform witness in embodiment, regeneration, and invocation; each its own attempt at a Black women's revolutionary performance of survival.

WRITE ABOUT O*UR PEOPLE: T*ELL THEIR STORY

"One woman walked out," my mother/house manager pursed her lips as she counted ticket stubs. "She was Black… I read her response survey," She said, as she handed me the small piece of paper. "She wrote that she was disappointed that we felt the need to put on a piece of theatre about women in prison and have all white women and not a single Black woman on stage." "If she only knew how hard we tried to hold on to the Black women in the cast," I countered "or better yet, if she had only auditioned…" We both laughed nervously at the irony, that in her body this Black/woman/Sister/ stranger held the very meaning making that she looked for that night.

The following Sister, is a chronicle of one of my moments of theoretical and artistic failure to perform survival for another Black woman. From January to April of 2015, I directed an ensemble theatre piece called *Any One of Us: Words from Prison*. Divisive feminist activist Eve Ensler conceived and wrote the piece. Ensler is perhaps best known for the *Vagina Monologues*, a series of interchangeable vignettes performed at women's centers and universities across the country. *Vagina Monologues* is a set of monologues based on interviews with women of varying ages, races, classes, and life

experiences, designed to bring attention to the universality of the struggle of women. *Any One of Us*, different in both scope and impact, is a devised ensemble piece composed of monologues, poems, fragmented thoughts and scenes written primarily by incarcerated women between 2000-04. Each woman's voice featured was a part of a series of writing workshops conducted by Eve Ensler. The final product is a deraced, unregionalized, unclassed version of real women's stories.

From the beginning, the job of directing this piece was tenuous. I worked with Conspire Theater: an applied theater group in Austin, Texas—committed to working with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women to help them tell their stories in order to reduce stigma around incarceration. Conspire Theater works primarily with the first person narratives of formally incarcerated women. The women typically perform versions of themselves onstage, their work often does not focus on their incarceration, but other aspects of their identity—motherhood, finding work, falling in love. It is from this background that I and my cast—made up of mostly actors who had auditioned and were not a part of the ensemble of formally incarcerated women, due to the constraints of the piece—entered into this production of *Any One of Us*. A text in which Eve Ensler, as a second wave feminist writer, embraces the idea of the universality of womanhood.

From the outset, it was clear that individual voices and stories were not nearly as important to Ensler as the collective message that violence against women begets violence. Moreover, that the struggle against our penal system isn't only about the rehabilitation of convicts, but also about rescuing women from systemic violence—violence enacted by their families, their circumstances and their past.

The cast was initially composed of eleven women. Of the eleven there was one woman of color, an African-American (who is a part of the Conspire ensemble). I aspired to set up an environment where I treated everyone the same. I ignored difference in an

attempt to democratize a deeply stratified space. While in the rehearsal room each of us was a person, woman identified, who was present to tell the story of another woman. I repeated daily "their story is not our story, but their story is important and it is a privilege to share it." What connected us was not an essentialist notion of what a woman is. Rather, what connected us was an inherent idea that violence and injustice should be advocated against. We believed, that together, by re-casting and performing their stories we could activate contemporary audiences to action for social justice.

An unresolvable issue arose in our third month of rehearsal. By this time three of the non-professional actors had left the play for various reasons mostly having to do with scheduling conflicts. The one African-American member of the cast, who had consistently missed rehearsals both for this project and also for other Conspire events was having a hard time. Her husband went through a relapse and they found it difficult to find both employment and housing. On several occasions I, along with the rest of the ensemble, offered to restructure her part so she had fewer lines to learn and less time that she had to devote to rehearsal. However, as opening night drew near it became apparent that she was neither able nor willing to be an active member of the collective that we had established. I knew that I had to ask her not to be a part of the project. This broke my heart for several reasons, not least of which was that it pained me—as a Black woman, well aware of the statistics of incarceration that effect people of color and African-Americans disproportionately—that there would not be a Black woman on stage as representative for the bodily violence enacted on this very specific group of people.

When I met with my actor about whether or not she would be able to continue with the group; I let her know that racial representation and the racial diversity of the group was among my concerns. She did not react well to this assertion. She let me know that this play, that Conspire, and her passion for the work was about women—not just

Black woman—and that this play had never been and was never about race. She then ran out of the space furious and deeply offended. I found her anger astonishing. This reaction took me aback, her words shook me.

As I look back on this incident I cannot help but wonder: Did I create an environment where the neutrality or even negation of our identities as inherently women also negated our identities as inherently Black? By refusing to locate any of our race, class, privilege, or criminal status; had I erased both of our ability to speak about her racialized body? She perceived my attempt at solidarity, when spoken explicitly, as an act of othering and isolation, that blows me away. How could I fail so throughly in a space where I, as a Black woman, took every chance to signify my intentions of solidarity to another Black woman.

bell hooks' examines this idea of finding political power in centering Blackness—rather than in interrogations of whiteness or more so in collective struggles against unraced oppressors—in "Black Love as Political Resistance" in her seminal book *Black Looks*. Her theory is tied to the idea that loving Blackness can be used as an oppositional tool to counter white supremacist culture. Through her Engaged Pedagogy she also explores the way that Black people, and in particular her students, have trouble centering Blackness—especially their own—as a tactic for critiquing the ways in which the dominant culture enacts anti-Black racism. She argues that, "Racial integration in a social context where white supremacist systems are intact undermines marginal spaces of resistance by promoting the assumption that social equality can be attained without changes in the culture's attitudes about Blackness and Black people" (hooks 10).

In short, according to hooks my experiment in collectivist—maybe even constructivist—representation was ill-fated. My work, rooted in the post-structuralist feminist practices of Applied Theatre, ignored the inherent racial bias and oppression that

pervaded both the lives of the women depicted in the production and the lives of the performers. To work to see Blackness on stage wasn't enough. My exercise in revolutionary art making needed to be more than revelatory in relation to the systemic injustice of our justice system. I needed to find ways where Blackness—Black identity, speech, the Black body—is centered and celebrate those moments explicitly, both in the rehearsal room and on the stage.

hooks' proposes theoretically that to re-write meaning in marginal spaces is an act of resistance. That is, in between regulated norms, Blackness can be reimagined outside of, on top of, and below society. Performance Studies, theoretically, also lives in a marginal space. Peggy Phelan describes Performance Studies as a field as a space of liminality and of negation. Performance, as a theoretical methodology, is often best described by what it is not. This methodological blank space originates from theorists like Michel Foucault, Victor Turner and Judith Butler. Butler specifically, as a poststructuralist, is thinking about that negation in terms of performances of gender and sex, in contrast to hooks' focus on explicitly Black hermeneutics. In her early work on performativity Butler argues that for humans there is nothing inherently female, there is nothing inherently male and there is no ontological heterosexual imperative. We are all only the product of the cultural signifiers that are projected onto us by society so that we learn to perform normativity. There is no essentialized identity. Rhetorically, racially, this theoretical framework is propagated and reborn in modern American performance pedagogy. This is especially true in community-based and Applied Theatre practice. One active critique of Butler is that in her early work she reads gender without regard to race.[8] In the preface to her 1999 edition of *Gender Trouble* Butler speaks to this critique:

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[8] For Butler's response to critiques of her early work see Alcoff

> The question of whether or not the theory of performativity can be transposed onto matters of race has been explored… race and gender ought not to be treated as simple analogies. I would therefore suggest that the question to ask is not whether the theory of performativity is transposable onto race, but what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with race. (Butler xvii)

This course correction is well taken and for the last twenty years Butler's theoretical writings on race and gender have attempted to speak to the racialized nature of gender construction and the gendered way that race is perceived. Unfortunately, though Butler's own views have grown more nuanced, her early writings, especially her text *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* have become foundational in many emerging fields including: Queer Studies, Film Studies and Performance Studies. This idea of marginalization and negation is oppositional to the liberatory practice imagined by hooks. When the individual is recognized as a blank slate—something that can be categorized but not essentialized—then performatively the action that African-Americans use to mark themselves, each other and to find modes of resistance for their causes is erased. When liminality becomes a negative space rather than a space for construction and opposition then the project of remapping identity through performance inadvertently erases edifices of Black centered resistance.

hooks expounds on this idea further in her essay "Marginality as a Site of Resistance." She revisits one of her earlier works *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* and continues working through the idea that marginality was "much more than a site of depravation" (hooks 341). She goes further and is able to name the margin as a constructive space, one that has a "radical possibility" for resistance (hooks 341). In understanding revolutionary performance's possibility to impact culture on the precipice, it is important to acknowledge that the goal is not always—if ever—to crossover from the

margins into the cultural center. Performing revolution is an act predicated on performing from a marginal space and to an extent of a marginal identity. To move away from that space is to remove the possibility of "radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternative, new worlds" (hooks 341). hooks is careful not to romanticize this marginal stronghold. Instead, she engages with the duality of the reality of oppressed peoples: "these margins have been both the sites of repression and sites of resistance" (hooks 342). Her radical positionality is a useful lens for two reasons: one, it is a position of agency. To respond "from a radical space of marginality" to oppression is a choice, a position that one has the opportunity to make (hooks 342). Two, the performance of marginal resistance centers the voice of the "other" creating subjectivity where there was only previously objectification. This ability to speak for one's own self is a liberatory act, because it has the ability to be both free (not subjugated or dominated) and different (the perspective of the marginalized).

In her canonical essay, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House," Audre Lorde begins to identify what it is specifically about "those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women…" is remarkable in comparison to non-othered identities (Lorde 112). In this essay she is advocating for the collecting of the collectivity of difference. Lorde argues that there is an essential sameness to be found in the experience of those "who have been forged in the crucibles of difference" (Lorde 112). The embodied nature of her argument is summed up in the statement "survival is not an academic skill" in this Lorde is privileging lived experience over intellectual knowledge production (Lorde 112). I continue that survival is more than a learned skill it is a bodily representation of the knowledge of survival. This is in response to the impulse to pathologize i.e. read an unnatural tolerance for bearing pain into the strength of Black women by valorizing our survival while simultaneously

painting our bodies as unrapeable and unvictimizable. This is harmful because the pathologizing of Black women's strength is symbolically connected to the invisibility of our struggle. I argue that by wedding the survival to the body that survives a sensory knowing is created. This knowledge of suffering as a result of being different is valuable, "Difference must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic" (Lorde 111). What isn't killing us, Sister, is the thing that facilitates our survival. It is a tool we've forged apart from the master's repertoire and it is a radical weapon. It is valuable, because in perpetuating our invisibility, knowledge created by us is all but unknowable to our oppressors.

It is only now, almost a year later, that I am able to see where and how I went astray. My training in community-based theatre privileges the safe space but it—and I—have a harder time with the specific space. Specific space, as in a creative process more concerned with the hard-fought real-ness of individuality; than the constructed reality of safety. If I could see my actor in this moment of pain and vulnerability not as someone who needed to be taken care of but as someone who needed to say something, I might have been able to see the place for her in our performance. Lorraine Hansberry writes in *A Raisin in The Sun:* "When you start measuring somebody, measure him right, child, measure him right. Make sure you done taken into account what hills and valleys he come through before he got to wherever he is" (Nemiroff and Hansberry 100). It is that attention to detail that I take as a learning and move toward as I examine how others, who have attempted to take up a similar mantle have fared.

COMPLETE MY THOUGHTS

This inquiry begins, Sister, and for the most part revolves around one story. *To Be Young, Gifted and Black,* is the posthumously published autobiography of Lorraine Hansberry. *To Be Young, Gifted and Black,* subtitled "Lorraine Hansberry in Her Own

Words" exists in three forms: as a radio broadcast, a Broadway production and a book. I first encountered the book. When I checked out *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* from the University of Texas Library, their only copy—a first edition paperback—was pristine. The pages were brittle and the spine was unbroken. As I began to dive into Hansberry's curated words I found something like a kindred spirit, Sister. James Baldwin once described Hansberry as a "Sister" and a "comrade" and as I fell in love with her words, her spirit and her commitment to revolution; I began to imagine her as my Sister as well.

Why then I wondered, was every page a revelation? Why was her story—so full of parallels with my own—unknown to me for so long? The unbroken spine of her book, Sister, is representative of something greater, a larger truth about how Black women are remembered and how we are forgotten. The woman that I found in its pages was a woman whose cultural reach is unfathomable but whose cultural capital borders on the nonexistent.

To Be Young, Gifted, and Black existed first as a radio broadcast in 1967. A seven and a half hour, two part program titled *Lorraine Hansberry: In Her Own Words* narrated by Ossie Davis and Harold Scott. Over 61 voices contributed to the taping including: Anne Bancroft, Lauren Bacall, Ralph Bellamy, Bette Davis, Ruby Dee, Louis Gossett, Rita Moreno, Sidney Poitier, Paul Robeson and Cicely Tyson (Hansberry 268). In 1969, Robert Nemiroff, Hansberry's ex-husband and executioner of her estate, produced an Off-Broadway adaptation of her autobiography *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*. The ensemble cast made up of men, women, white people and Black people, all took turns playing roles from her productions. They also rotated speaking as Hansberry while performing excerpts from her personal journals, correspondence and her public appearances. Harry Belafonte produced the original production—Belafonte was also the primary benefactor—in association with Chiz Schultz, Edgar Hansberry and Robert Neimroff. It was directed by

Gene Frankel. *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* opened at the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York City on January 2, 1969, and ran for twelve months—the longest running Off-Broadway show of the 1968-1969 season (Hansberry 268).

Finally, in late 1969 Prentice Hall Press published the paperback autobiography. Again and again in the pages of the autobiography that Robert Nemiroff painstakingly constructed from the remnants of the brief life of his ex-wife are hints that he believed in her exceptionalism and her ability to represent "a prophetic chapter in the history of a people and an age" (Hansberry xviii). However, Nemiroff in this zeal to center Hansberry as an iconic *and* allegorical figure found it difficult to rally support around preserving her memory. Why, when she was so popular in life, was she so easy to forget in death? Sister, I'm sure it was obvious to you from the beginning that Hansberry herself provided the answer.

IN HER OWN WORDS

Lights up. A woman appears. She is flanked by a diverse group of performers. Each dressed in a bright poly blend. She stands just distinct from the fray. Very slowly, she alone comes into focus:

> LORRAINE HANSBERRY: Ladies and Gentlemen, Fellow Writers:
>
> > I have had an opportunity to read three of the winning compositions in this United Negro College Fund contest—and it is clear I am addressing fellow writers indeed.
> >
> > (*Looking about in turn at each of the presumed three in the audience)*
> >
> > Miss Purvis, Miss Yeldell and Mr. Lewis—I commend you and add my personal congratulations to the awards of the afternoon.
> >
> > Apart from anything else, I wanted to be able to come here and speak with you on this occasion because you are young, gifted and Black. In the month of

May in the year 1964, I, for one, can think of no more dynamic combination that a person might be.

The Negro writer stands surrounded by the whirling elements of this world. He stands neither on the fringe nor utterly involved: the prime observer waiting poised for inclusion.

O, The things that we have learned in this unkind house that we have to tell the world about!

Despair? Did someone say despair was a question in the world? Well then, Listen to the sons of those who have known little else if you wish to know the resiliency of this thing you would so quickly resign to mythhood, this thing called the human spirit…

Life? Ask those who have tasted it in pieces rationed out by enemies.

Love? Ah, ask the troubadours who come from those who have loved when all reason pointed to the uselessness and foolhardiness of love. Perhaps we shall be the teachers when it is done. Out of the depths of pain we have thought to be our sole heritage in this world—O, we know about love!

And that is why I say to *you* that, though it be a thrilling and marvelous thing to be merely young and gifted in such times, it is doubly so, doubly dynamic —to be young, gifted *and Black*.

Look at the work that awaits you!

Write if you will: but write about the world as it is and as you think it *ought* to be and must be—if there is to be a world.

Write about all the things that men have written about since the beginning of writing and talking—but write *to a point*.

Work hard at it, *care* about it.

Write about *our people:* tell their story. You have something glorious to draw on begging for your attention. Don't pass it up. U*se* it.

Good luck to you. This Nation needs your gifts.

Perfect them! (262-263)

In the Off-Broadway production, Cicely Tyson performed the *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* Monologue. Creative Arts Television's *Camera Three Program* recorded a video of the stage production. A young Tyson—in her mid-thirties at the time of the taping—embodies the spirit of the fiery Hansberry. Tonally, she sings through the text, hitting every italic with the verve of an AME minister. Her collared shirt is dark, but it dances in the light as she speaks. In Daphne Brooks' critical analysis of Nina Simone's *Four Women,* she remarks how the final note of the recording, is a guttural utterance, unintelligible to an untrained ear, a ferocious note that disqualifies Simone's voice from the easy categorization that usually comes with Black women's singing (DeFrantz 212). Tyson finds that note, and sings in harmony as she sails over the word "Marvelous." Halfway though the speech, the word sits flat on the page; a prelude to the "doubly dynamic" alliteration of the true star of the text. However, Tyson lands hard on the word, eking all of the air out of it. Sailing past the "MAHvalous" front loading of saccharine niceties of the women of the upper East Side, and landing on the end of the word until all of the air has run out of it like a balloon. "Marrvvoullllss," it bites when she says it. Dripping with irony, I hear again for the first time how well Hansberry know marvelous things—like white fur coats and middle class houses—and cared not for them at all. Tyson remains still during the speech, holding a book that she never references, sure of her words and the impact that they will have. Tyson chooses to play a version of Lorraine Hansberry, a woman who she knew well. She embodies her. Finding her spirit and her energy in her own body and using that spirit to fill her up. A testimony, a ghost (holy or otherwise), maybe even an elusive muse. A muse whom Hansberry herself found messy and untidy, Tyson in her speech to young writers embodies the essence of Hansberry's fierce convection and deep ambivalence toward humanity. Her piercing gaze a conduit,

she is no longer speaking to three talented youths: she is testifying to a congregation, composed, in control, full of life and living. She is invoking the future.

The principal problem with this invocation is that it ignores the original sentiment of the text. Hansberry as an author and as an activist knew that it was impossible to usher in the future by canonizing the past. According to Margaret Wilkerson, "Hansberry, if nothing else, detested labels and fought against them all of her life" (*Excavating* Wilkerson 80). So an attempt at embodiment is in a way, a label making enterprise that both Hansberry and by continuation her body of work heartily rejected at the core.

Her writing instead is tied to the ideals of forward progress at the expense of monuments to past achievements. This theme can be found many places in her work, one of the most prominent is in the last pages of *A Raisin in the Sun*. In *A Raisin in the Sun,* the Younger family, when faced with the option to stay in their Southside Chicago neighborhood and earn a handsome compensation for doing so, choose instead to move into the unknown, the white suburb of Clybourne Park. The death of their father afforded them the opportunity for socio-economic advancement, but instead of staying in the relative comfort of their neighborhood and resting on his accomplishments they choose to face a future that they cannot imagine. A future, not—as many critics assumed—of assimilation, but one of infiltration where they will live as middle class Americans. Black and upwardly mobile but not in anyway exceptional. The Younger family then becomes representative of a greater truth: that given a fair opportunity any Black family can "make it" in a white world. In this we see that the end of the play for the Youngers might represent a beginning for others. This generational vision was realized when *Clybourne Park*, Bruce Norris's 2010 re-imagining of the Younger's move won a Pulitzer Prize. Audiences received *Clybourne Park* with ambivalence, but it has become an heir to the Hansberry legacy even inspiring Kwame Kwei-Armah's *Beneatha's Place* two years later.

This comes in stark contrast to the Tony Award-winning *Raisin!* the musical remake of *A Raisin in the Sun* produced by Robert Neimroff. Though *Raisin!* won the Tony Award for Best Musical in 1973, the production quickly faded into obscurity and is rarely produced. Put simply, Hansberry's work demands for her thoughts to be completed not repeated. In that completion she hoped that her words would be "used" not as rarified—and commodified—canonical text but as a starter: the nutrition rich yeast that contributes to the rise of many loaves.

SO MANY WHO THINK AS I DO

In contrast to Neimroff's pursuit of the invocation of Hansberry's spirit; Nina Simone was not interested in embodying her dear friend Lorraine, she was interested in regenerating her revolutionary spirit for a new generation. In the winter of 1969 seeing a headline and an image of her old friend inspired her to write the song "To Be Young, Gifted and Black," not about the play or even about Hansberry's words but about the young, gifted and Black people that she saw all around her. In this way Simone reimagined herself not as the wise warrior speaking to the new recruits, but as a recruit herself.

Simone and Hansberry's relationship is a source of deep fascination for me, Sister. Both women struggled mightily with loneliness and isolation, both women grew up in relative comfort in comparison to their Black peers, both women were deeply sexual though never quite confident in their own outward sexual appeal and both women were married to men but had explored their sexuality in a fluid way that included relationships with other women. Their love for each other was rooted in a kinship of marginal existence. They both knew, intimately, what it was to live outside of the normal expectations of society and the work they produced after coming to know to each was both a mark of the influence of the times and the influence of having found a kindred

spirit. This influence, is often ignored in scholarship on both women. Margaret Wilkerson, when noting the people present at Hansberry's funeral, lists notable collaborators, activists and celebrities. And, "then there were her intimates, women who shared a part of her emotional life but not her intellectual vision" (*Dark Vision* Wilkerson 644). Simone does not illicit a mention in the category of celebrity, activist or "intimate."

How then, Sister, might we begin to understand the intimacy that fueled the relationship between these two women? In Simone's 1969 tribute song "To Be Young, Gifted and Black," it is clear that she understood—perhaps better even than Hansberry's ex-husband—what a true commemoration of Lorraine Hansberry would require. Simone moved past an attempt to label Hansberry, or to capture her in a moment in time and instead took up the opportunity to follow her lead at an appointed time. In that Simone created an entirely new performance inspired by Hansberry but not beholden to her. Because of her generative pursuit, her song had the effect of re-generating Hansberry for a new generation. Her performance of memory was wildly successful, "To Be Young, Gifted and Black" was the top selling single from the 1970 album *Black Gold*. It was a top ten R&B hit on the Billboard chart and made it to number 76 on Billboards Top 100. It has been covered numerous times by such artists as Aretha Franklin and Elton John and sampled dozens of times by as many artists including: Jay-Z and Mary J. Blige. "To Be Young, Gifted, and Black" is the anthem of a generation. It accompanied Black Liberation and Black Power into a new decade, cementing Hansberry's language into the cultural lexicon.

Lights up for the second time. Another woman takes her place. She sits at a piano in a gymnasium. She is accompanied by men in Dashikis. She wears all Black from her boots to her Afro including a Black orchid corsage. She begins to play the keys:

Oh what a lovely precious dream

To be young, gifted and Black,

Open your heart to what I mean

In the whole world you know

There are billion boys and girls

Who are young, gifted and Black,

And that's a fact!

Young, gifted and Black

We must begin to tell our young

There's a world waiting for you

This is a quest that's just begun

When you feel really low

Yeah, there's a great truth you should know

When you're young, gifted and Black

Your soul's intact

Young, gifted and Black

How I long to know the truth

There are times when I look back

And I am haunted by my youth

Oh but my joy of today

Is that we can all be proud to say

To be young, gifted and Black

Is where it's at (Irvine and Simone)

The stage widens, it is no longer just Simone at the piano and the men on stage with her. All of the sudden she is surrounded by a sea of Blackness. A sea of young Black people celebrating their Blackness, a ritual of acceptance and Black love that marks the rekindling of a very powerful site of resistance. A disciple of Hansberry, it is an oft cited fact that Hansberry's revolutionary fire was the spark that lit Simone's protest spirit. I see in this song, that beyond a teacher pupil relationship Simone understood herself as Hansberry's progeny. Further, Simone continues the natal affiliation by marking a new generation of youths who need to be told about their greatness. This time not from the margins, she instead names a "billion boys and girls" who can be called upon to continue the legacy of greatness, there is no exceptionalism in her tone. The punchy irony and nationalist impulse is gone by 1969 and Simone imagines a new utopia where Blackness reigns, is celebrated and is unwavering in its greatness. She does this all in a gym at Morehouse College surrounded by youth. Bright eyed and excited, hopeful for a future that they can call their own. This contained plurally reflexive threshold—as most college campuses perennially are—is the perfect forum for her utopian ideal.

THE PRIME OBSERVER

Lorraine Hansberry passed away just eight months after she spoke of the exceptional possibility of being young, gifted and Black. She died at the age of 34 and it would be both trite and true to say that she died before her time. The *truly Marvelous* thing Sister, was that she lived before her time as well.

To be young and gifted was one thing. After all, the enterprising spirit of the American psyche depends on American youth and talent. To be young and gifted was, in the mid and late 1960s, what it meant to be American. From The Civil Rights Movement to the Vietnam War, the young and gifted represented the potential for survival of the American dream, as our "Greatest Generation" came of age. Hansberry in her eternally

youthful wisdom found a way of seeing Blackness though a nationalist loophole. From the margins she admired Blackness, rather than seeing it as an identity marker to be recoiled from, apologized for or erased. She foretold the Black liberation movement in her vision of the future of Black identity that did not seek equality or respectability in order to fit into a white mold. Instead, she boldly equated the marginality of Blackness—all that white America despises—with the expectionalism of the young and gifted bootstrapping American—all that America worships. In one revolutionary testimony she found resistance in the margin. In the subsequent witness to her testimony, Amens echoed her refrain corroborating her prophetic vision for decades after her death.

Margaret Wilkerson, in her article "The Dark Vision of Lorraine Hansberry," imagines Hansberry watching the events of her own funeral and laughing. "[S]he stands neither on the fringe nor utterly involved: the prime observer waiting poised for inclusion." Can you imagine a better image of what it is to be young, gifted and Black, Sister, than your biographer conjuring the idea of your impish delight as you survey the humanity of those who have loved and lost you? bell hooks excavates a sentiment that might be at the heart of Lorraine Hansberry's spirited final public address. With her prophetic eye, Lorraine could see the margin in which she and her people existed and could imagine her way through and out of it.

In order to speak from the margin one must first identify with it. Hansberry, in many ways lived her entire life as an outsider. She was a middle class Black girl from a well to do family, who thanks to racist housing policies grew up in a Chicago ghetto. The defining moment of her childhood, was her mother sending her to school in a white fur coat—a Christmas gift—during the Great Depression. The embarrassment she felt followed her into adulthood. Later, after her family moved into a middle class white neighborhood, while her father was in Washington, D.C. spending a small fortune

fighting the case that would eventually become the Supreme Court decision Hansberry v. Lee, her mother patrolled their home at night with a shotgun and mobs harassed Lorraine on her way to school every morning. She remembered the strength of the Black children who never quite understood her, and rather than resent their violence and quickness to fight she summoned their strength from the margins and made it her own. She was a communist, a leftist journalist and a queer woman at a time when any one of those identities would have marked her as a fringe character. As a young writer for Paul Robeson's newspaper, *Freedom,* she distinguished herself as a radical presence. Fierce and observant, she embraced the role of outsider even in her life's pursuit, "I'm not sure yet how much of a writer I am. I suppose I have been invited because my first play will be opening soon. I think I like it, but I have no idea what the public will think of it. Still for the moment, let's presume I am a writer…" (Hansberry 3).

Even though she was an active member of the communist party during her time at the University of Wisconsin, the FBI cleared her first Broadway production, *A Raisin in the Sun* of any aspersions. They may have acted too hastily, however. Everything that Hansberry wrote—though she may have been hesitant about its merit or her identity as a writer—she imbedded with the confidence of one who truly believed in the possibility of revolution. In the early 1960s after Kennedy's assassination she began to speak more openly about the revolutionary potential of Blackness:

> And I sat down and wrote a letter to the *Times* about the fact that I am of a generation of Negroes that comes after a whole lot of *other* generations of Negroes. And I said, you know you—can't you understand that *this* is the perspective from which we are now speaking? It isn't as if we got up today and said, "what can we do to irritate America?" It's because, since 1619, Negroes have tried it all; there isn't anything that hasn't been exhausted. Isn't it rather remarkable that we can talk about a people who were publishing while they were still in slavery, in 1827, you see. They have been doing everything—writing

> editorials, Mr. Wechsler, for a long time and now the charge of impatience is simply unbearable. (Hansberry 246)

Though, she found places for her revolutionary spirit to live both in writing and around her writing practice: "I can't help it—I think that's awful silly, this sitting down and 'writing' like a duty. People celebrate it so much because it makes them feel that the writer isn't so precarious a creature," she continued to engage with writing as a gift, something untamable and unknowable rather than a craft (Hansberry 183). This positionality as a "housewife turned playwright" allowed her to see herself as an outsider. One who both lives and respects at a distance the duty inherent in the title "writer." I believe that once she finally embraced herself as a writer, it wasn't from "the center." As bell hooks might say, it was as a marginal figure, Lorde's consummate outsider.

From the outside she could see the world as it was and begin to imagine how it might be. Rather than looking for reason or higher meaning in her writing, or exceptionalism in her story, she believed that specificity of experience would lead to universality of understanding. In a conversation with a Greenwich Village intellectual she espoused her true and deep faith in humanity and what about her personal experience fueled that love:

> Man is unique in the universe, the only creature who has in fact the power to transform the universe. Therefore, it did not seem unthinkable to me that man might just do what apes never will—impose the reason for life on life… I wish to live because life has within it that which is good, that which is beautiful, and that which I love. Therefore since I have known all these things, I have found them to be reason enough and—I wish to live. Moreover, because this is so, I wish others to live for generations and generations and generations. (Hansberry 41)

Conversely, her marginal position and commitment to centering her identity and specifically her Black identity created an opportunity for her to imagine pain outside of

her experience. From her modern East Village jewish Philosopher and poet—the title character—Sidney Burstein in *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* to her conflicted revolutionary African protagonist in *Les Blancs,* Hansberry's marginal identity and grasp on the value that that identity held, allowed her to foretell many of the most important international stories of the twentieth century. As Tshembe Matoseh, the reluctant revolutionary protagonist of *Les Blancs,* tells the idealistic American reporter Charlie Morris:

> TSHEMBE: Oh dear God, why do you *need* it so? The absolute longing for my hatred! I shall be honest with you, Morris. I do not hate all white men—but I desperately wish that I did. It would make everything infinitely easier! But I am afraid that among other things, I have *seen* the slums of Liverpool and Dublin and the caves above Naples; I have seen Dachau and Anne Frank's attic in Amsterdam; I have seen too many raw-knuckled Frenchmen coming out of the Metro at dawn and too many pop-eyed Italian children—to believe that those who raided Africa for three centuries ever loved the white race either. Race is a device—no more, no less. It explains nothing at all. I would like to be simple-minded for you, Mr. Morris—
>
> (*Turning these eyes that have "seen" up to the* OTHER)
>
> —but I cannot. I have seen. (Hansberry 256)

Hansberry's legacy is that of a witness. She was an audience to one of the greatest cultural revolutions in history and she accepted the role of one who—as Brecht demands of all theatre audiences—"looks critically." The role of witness, is more than a role of accountably it is a role of multiplicity. In an effort to witness on behalf of others—Black women—it is imperative to think as Hansberry did and as Simone did of Hansberry. The act of bearing witness is about saying what you have seen, who you have seen *and how* that has changed you.

CONCLUSION

Sister, we have come to the end of this brief journey and we have survived. Not so long ago, I began this enterprise alone and with one question: How do Black women survive? In a country where even our stories have had to fight for freedom from slavery, how do we know who we are as we walk through this world? By employing a conscious dramaturgy; I—in the vein of bell hooks and her Engaged Pedagogy and D. Soyini Madison in her Critical Ethnography—sought to read history as an advocate, someone in search of performances of revolutionary survival. In that search I found you. I found that in my attempt to read and then restate survival that I could not do it alone. Lorraine Hansberry and Nina Simone had each other and I have come to understand, Sister, that their deep love for each other correlates with their bravery in the world. I began this inquiry thinking about Black women and what it means to scream into a void whether it be in courtrooms, in churches, in theaters or in concert halls: who hears us when we tell our own story? The truth I found is that Sister, we hear each other. Like sentinels on a wall, warning of impending invasion, the performance of bearing witness to each other's testimony allows us all to survive.

Appendix A: Complete Song Lyrics

"MISSISSIPPI GODDAM"

By Nina Simone

Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam
Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam
Can't you see it
Can't you feel it
It's all in the air
I can't stand the pressure much longer Somebody say a prayer
Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam

This is a show tune
But the show hasn't been written for it, yet
Hound dogs on my trail
School children sitting in jail
Black cat cross my path
I think every day's gonna be my last
Lord have mercy on this land of mine
We all gonna get it in due time
I don't belong here
I don't belong there
I've even stopped believing in prayer
Don't tell me

I tell you
Me and my people just about due I've been there so I know
They keep on saying "Go slow!"
But that's just the trouble "do it slow"
Washing the windows "do it slow"
Picking the cotton
"do it slow"
You're just plain rotten "do it slow"
You're too damn lazy "do it slow"
The thinking's crazy "do it slow"
Where am I going What am I doing I don't know
I don't know
Just try to do your very best
Stand up be counted with all the rest
For everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam
I bet you thought I was kiddin'—didn't you?
Picket lines School boycotts
They try to say it's a communist plot
All I want is equality
for my sister my brother my people and me
Yes you lied to me all these years
You told me to wash and clean my ears And talk real fine just like a lady
And you'd stop calling me Sister Sadie
Oh but this whole country is full of lies You're all gonna die and die like flies
I don't trust you any more
You keep on saying "Go slow!"
"Go slow!"
But that's just the trouble "do it slow"
Desegregation "do it slow"

Mass participation “do it slow”
Reunification “do it slow”
Do things gradually “do it slow”
But bring more tragedy “do it slow”
Why don’t you see it Why don’t you feel it I don’t know
I don’t know
You don’t have to live next to me
Just give me my equality
Everybody knows about Mississippi
Everybody knows about Alabama
Everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam

“MOON OVER ALABAMA”

By Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht
Oh, show us the way to the next whiskey bar!
Oh don't ask why,
Oh don't ask why!
For we must find the next whiskey bar
For if we don't find the next whiskey bar,
I tell you we must die!

Oh moon of Alabama
We now must say goodbye
We've lost our good old mamma
And must have whiskey
Oh, you know why.

Oh show us the way to the next pretty boy!
Oh don't ask why

Oh, don't ask why!
For we must find the next pretty boy
For if we don't find the next pretty boy
I tell you we must die!

Oh moon of Alabama
We now must say goodbye
We've lost our good old mama
And must have boys
Oh, you know why.

Oh show us the way to the next little dollar!
Oh don't ask why,
oh don't ask why!
For we must find the next little dollar
For if we don't find the next little dollar
I tell you we must die!

Oh moon of Alabama
We now must say goodbye
We've lost our good old mama
And must have dollars
Oh, you know why.

"To Be Young, Gifted and Black"
By Nina Simone with lyrics by Weldon Irvine
Oh what a lovely precious dream
To be young, gifted and Black,
Open your heart to what I mean

In the whole world you know
There are billion boys and girls
Who are young, gifted and Black,
And that's a fact!
Young, gifted and Black
We must begin to tell our young
There's a world waiting for you
This is a quest that's just begun
When you feel really low
Yeah, there's a great truth you should know
When you're young, gifted and Black
Your soul's intact
Young, gifted and Black
How I long to know the truth
There are times when I look back
And I am haunted by my youth
Oh but my joy of today
Is that we can all be proud to say
To be young, gifted and Black
Is where it's at

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